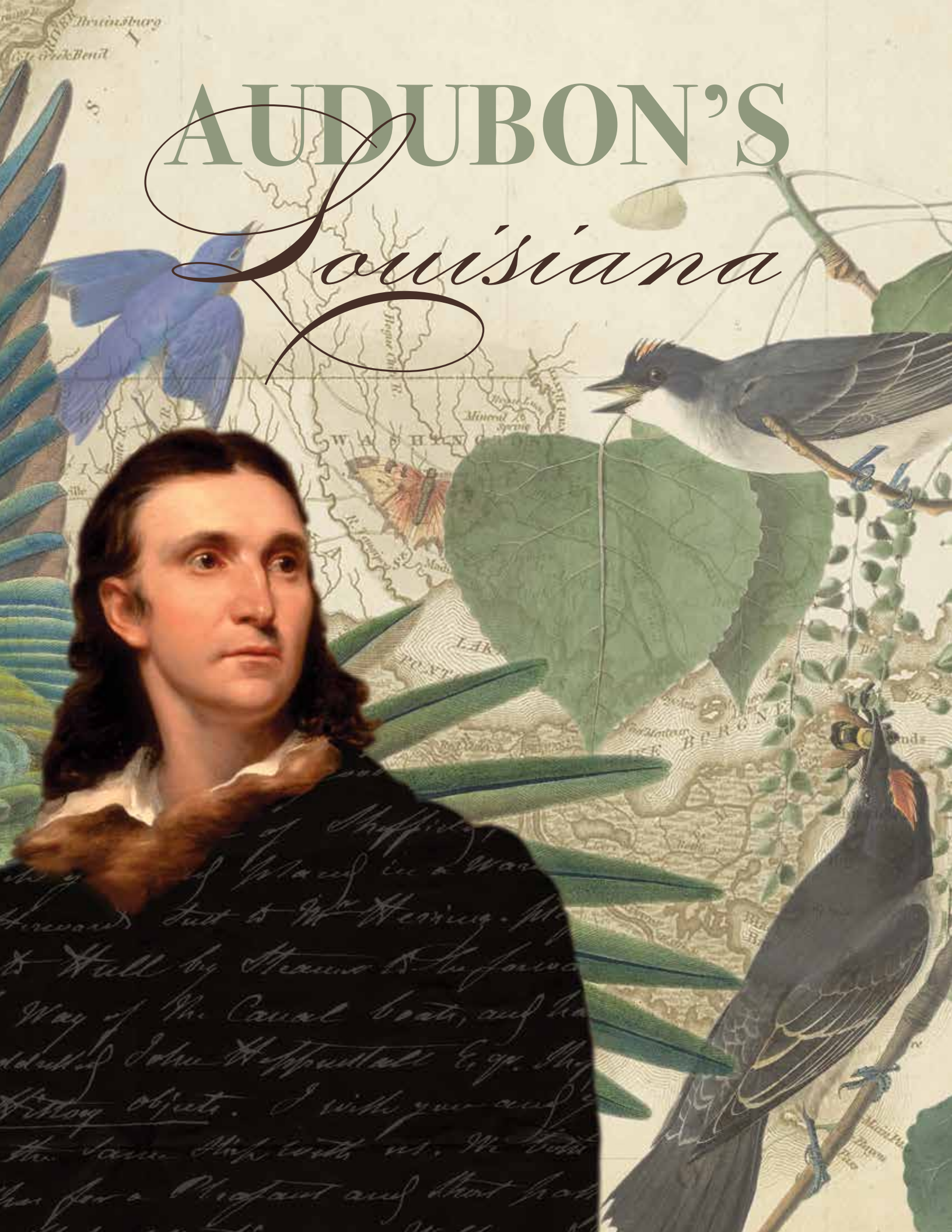
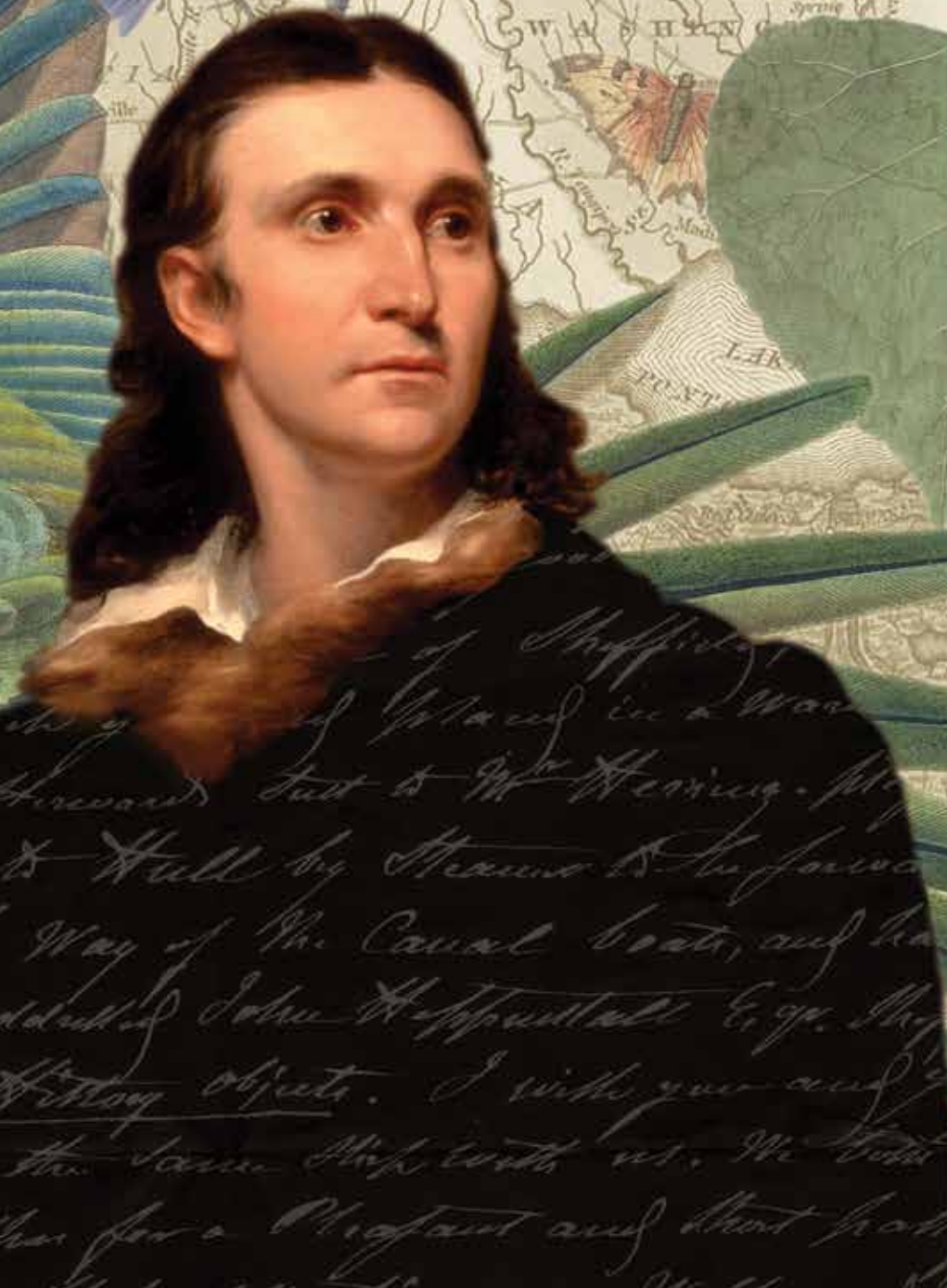


AUDUBON'S

Louisiana



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214. *Rufous-crowned Wren*.
Troglodytes aedon.
 (See also *Troglodytes* *edmonstonei*.)
 (See also *Troglodytes* *edmonstonei*.)





AUDUBON'S *Louisiana*

INTRODUCTION

Opposite: Portrait of John James Audubon painted by John Syme

Upon reviewing the numerous biographies produced on the life of John James Audubon it soon becomes apparent that for all his talents and capabilities, it was his ability to literally create his own narrative as he went along - instantly reinventing himself each time a situation dictated - which is so striking. In his complicated life, there were many occasions in which this special talent was called upon, not the least of which involved his desire to observe, collect, and paint every bird native to the United States. His naturally strong personality and extroverted demeanor, combined with training in such high social skills as music, dance, fencing, riding, and conversation, resulted in a person who exuded an air of self-confidence that often crossed the line into arrogance, and occasionally led him into harmfully delusional thoughts and circumstances.

Born in 1785 on the Caribbean island of Saint Domingue (today's Haiti), the illegitimate child of a seafaring, commodity-trading, sugar planting Frenchman and his chambermaid, Audubon's humble beginnings could well have consigned him to a life of ignominy. But after his mother, Jeanne Rabin died shortly after his birth, three-year-old Audubon was sent by Jean Audubon, his father to live at Jean's estate in the Nantes region of France with his wealthy, childless, dotting wife, Anne Moynet. Here he would be afforded the best in everything, and grew into

the privileged life of a young dandy. It was also here that his fascination with nature began, often trading his school lessons for romps in the forest that ran along the Loire River, amassing his own little museum of shells, birds' nests, and numerous other natural artifacts.

In an effort to camouflage his son's embarrassing birth story, Jean Audubon would claim that John was born in Louisiana to a wealthy Spanish woman. This rearrangement of the facts proved convenient when, to escape conscription into Napoleon's ever growing/shrinking army in 1803, eighteen-year-old John was sent to America with a passport that listed him as a citizen of "Louisiana." Settling into a farm near Norristown, Pennsylvania that his father had purchased 14 years earlier, Audubon charmed his new neighbor, Lucy Bakewell, along with her entire family, with his overt personality and cultural refinement. Smitten by Lucy, Audubon travelled back to France in 1805 to seek his father's permission to marry her. He spent that entire year around Nantes, drawing life-sized portraits of birds of the Loire Valley. More importantly, he seized the opportunity to study under local physician and naturalist Charles-Marie d'Orbigny, where he learned the art of bird taxidermy as well as the scientific methodologies associated with collecting, measuring, dissecting, and categorizing bird specimens - the essential tools of the field ornithologist. Now, he would be truly poised to become an orni-

Below: Yellow Rail





Above: Lucy Bakewell Audubon

thologist and bird artist, but that plan would have to wait, as his father mandated he enter the business world if he wanted to marry Lucy.

In 1806 he returned to America, this time with family friend and new business partner Ferdinand Rozier in tow. Together, they sold Jean Audubon's Pennsylvania farm and moved as far west as civilization and market demand would allow at the time and set up a general store on the banks of the Ohio River in Louisville, Kentucky. Once the store was up and running, Audubon married his beloved Lucy in 1808 and moved her to Louisville. Up to that point, Audubon had little interest in anything but natural history and drawing birds. Now, with a young wife to support, he would find it necessary to earn a living. By the same token, it would not be long before he would come to fully realize the intensity of his obsession with birds. Later, in an autobiography entitled *Myself*, which he produced specifically for his sons John and Victor, he wrote,

"Were I to tell you that once, when travelling, and driving several horses before me laden with goods and dollars, I lost sight of the pack saddles, and the cash they bore, to watch the motions of a warbler, I should repeat [similar] occurrences that happened a hundred times and more in those days."

By 1810, if Audubon had not yet fully formed the outlandish idea of seeing and painting every bird in North America, a chance meeting with fellow seat-of-the-pants artist and ornithologist Alexander Wilson at the Audubon & Rozier store in March of that year probably sealed the deal. Unbeknownst to Audubon, Wilson – a Scottish weaver, erstwhile poet, and teacher - had landed in Philadelphia some sixteen years earlier. Encouraged by legendary naturalist William Bartram, Wilson himself had hatched a plan to paint every U.S. bird. Now here he stood before a flabbergasted Audubon, showing sample engravings of his nearly finished American Ornithology. In only his third year of the project, Wilson was already scouring the countryside in search of subscriptions to finance the publication of his work.

Audubon immediately wanted to sign up. Present day birders can easily imagine the discomfort of birding in a new place where no field guide is available. Up to that point, the only ornithological reference Audubon had to go on was a translated copy of Linneus' 12th edition (1768) of *Systemae Naturae*, which primarily contained line drawings of Old World bird species. Ironically, Audubon's "Turton's" (the translation was done in 1793 by English naturalist William Turton) would be his only field guide during most all of his bird-painting treks across North America. In any case, Rozier intervened, objecting to the exorbitant subscrip-

tion price (\$125) that Wilson was asking, and telling Audubon in French: *"Your drawings are certainly better, and again you must know as much of the habits of American birds as this gentleman."*

Audubon showed Wilson some of his own work, and almost pleadingly proposed a collaboration. Wilson, no doubt stung at having a potential subscription so near to his hand before losing it, curtly declined Audubon's offer and departed in a huff. We can only imagine Audubon's state of mind at that time. First, he had just met someone who was nearing completion of a monumental project that had only been a vague dream of his up until that point. Secondly, the author of what would become the first U.S. bird field guide - a document which he sorely needed, and would cost him untold hours to (unsuccessfully) track down in subsequent years - had just walked out of his door.

Ultimately, Audubon's passion would come to dictate his true vocation, but not before a ten-year string of financial misadventures would render him penniless and force him to sink or swim. Running into a rare bit of luck in 1820 he obtained a job as specimen preparator at the new Western Museum, a natural history museum downriver in Cincinnati, Ohio. Though short-lived, the job afforded three valuable opportunities. First, he was subsequently invited to mount his first ever exhibit of bird paintings at the Western Museum, an academic institution (resulting in important letters of recommendation from important people). Second, while in Cincinnati he learned that he could generate income fairly easily by both teaching art classes and drawing or painting portraits of people who could afford such things. He came to realize that such "as needed" skills could free him to pursue his now-solidified objective of painting every bird native to the United States. He could carry those skills with him wherever he went, thus supplying his family with much needed money, as well as keep him furnished with bird-shot, gunpowder, and art supplies. Third, Cincinnati is where Audubon was fortunate enough to cross paths with Joseph Mason, a thirteen-year-old art student of his, and a true painting prodigy - especially when it came to painting foliage, flowers, and other botanical elements. Audubon had already decided that his bird paintings would be rendered with each species in its own natural environment; not upon some generic branch as depicted by his predecessors.

It was at this point that Audubon's true mission became clear to him. He would travel to New Orleans to paint more birds. He had been there before (chasing down yet another sketchy business partner who had made off with a steamboat in which they had co-invested) and had seen lots of birds. In 1820 New Orleans was the 5th largest city in the United States. Surely he could find work there painting portraits and teaching art. Moreover, he had an Ohio River friend who traded regularly there



Opposite: Blue-winged Warblers by John James Audubon with background painted by Joseph Mason





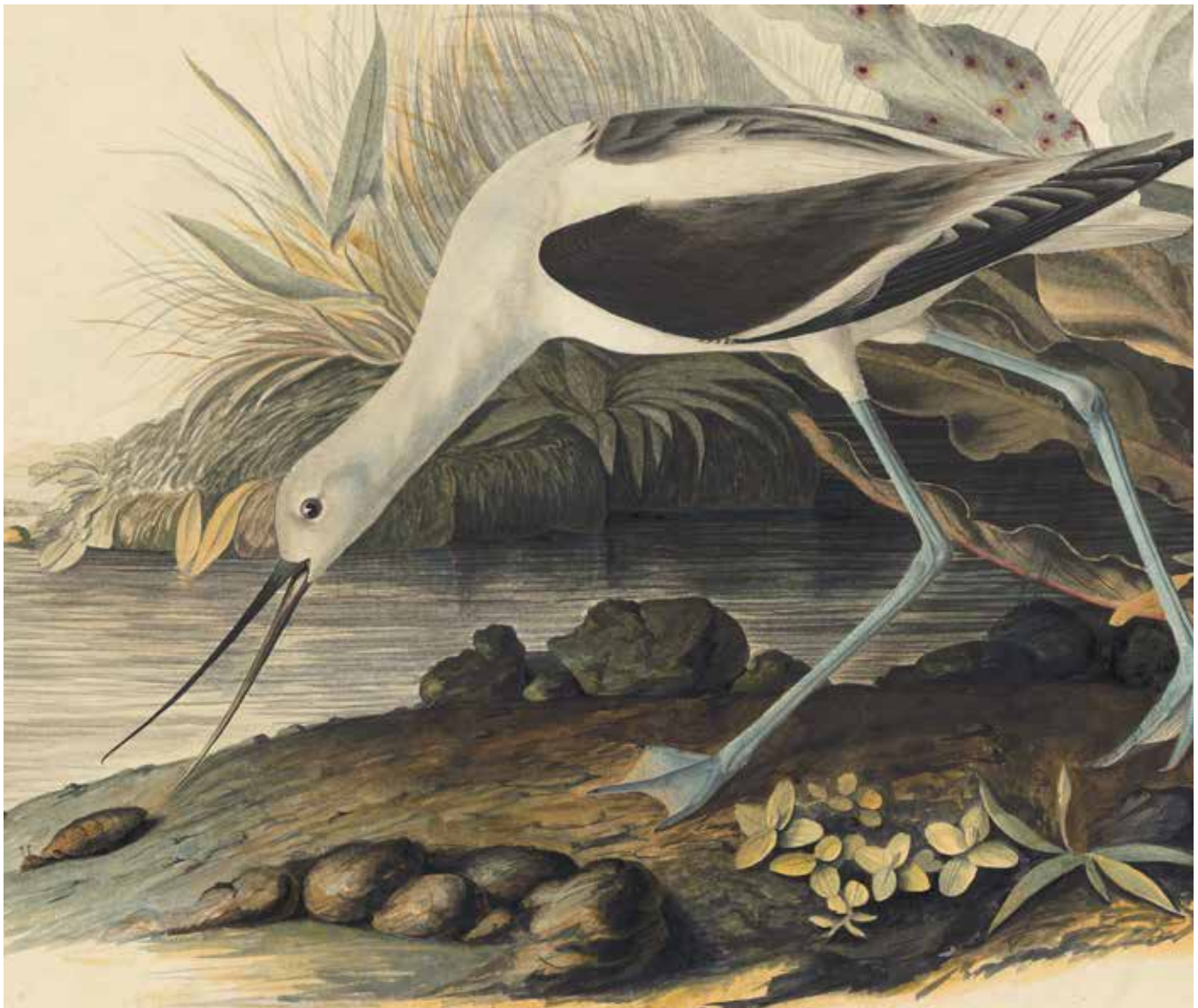
and could introduce him to important people. Finally, he would be fully committed to the mission of his dreams, journaling, “*My Talents are to be My Support and My enthusiasm My Guide.*” Lucy, having just been hired on as a school teacher in Cincinnati, endorsed his plan. Still in mourning over the loss of two baby daughters, she would stay behind with their two young sons, freeing Audubon to chase his holy grail to his hearts’ content.

Pronouncing young Joseph Mason “big for his age,” Audubon asked him along as his assistant. Unable to afford even keelboat passage down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, he and Mason hired on as hunters/food gatherers on a lowly flatboat and set out for New Orleans on October 12, 1820. The journey would take nearly three hard-scrabble, weather-beaten months.

Our story, “Audubon’s Louisiana,” picks up on December 21, 1820 as a thirty-five-year-old John James Audubon drifts into Louisiana . . .

Opposite: Bewick’s Wren

Below: American Avocet





Gavia arctica
arctica

Length 2 1/2 ft.
Stretch 3 1/2 ft.
Wing 1 1/2 ft.
Tail 1 1/2 ft.

Black-throated Loon or Loon Bird
Gavia arctica
This is a small bird, common in the north.

AUDUBON *in Louisiana*

Opposite: Anhingas

Excluding entries made during his 1817 pursuit of a scoundrel of a business partner from Kentucky down to New Orleans, Audubon's first journal entry from Louisiana this time around comes when his flatboat lands on an island (possibly Davis Island) in the drift-tree filled Mississippi River. It is five days before Christmas 1820. The region is filled with virgin cypress, dense cane breaks, pelicans, mating geese, teals, Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, cardinals, and Carolina Wrens. To his west, the new state

Below: Brown Pelican



of Louisiana below the Arkansas Territory. To his east, the nations of the Chickasaw and Choctaw above the new state of Mississippi, positioned for their annexation. He wrote,

“Thursday Decemb^r 21th 1820 [floating into Louisiana]

We at last had fine weather, floated about 35 miles...Drawing nearly all day...

Saw in the afternoon a Black Hawk, a flock of Pelicans... Vast Many Geese seen all day, these Birds Now Pairing. Spanish Moss very abundant on all the Cypress trees—Large flocks of American Teals and the constant Cry of Ivory Billed Wood Peckers about us..... Carolina Wrens and Cardinals exercising their Vocal powers all day..... the Geese where in Thousands on the Willow Bar, fighting and Mating. Mallards, Teals and Wood Ducks abundant... saw One Swan — One Redtailed Hawk, several Sparrow Hawks — Many Crested Titmouse [Tufted Titmouse] — Autumnal Warblers [probably Yellow-rumped Warbler] all through the Shaggy Beards [moss draped cypress]— The Carrion Crow [Black Vulture]

Opposite: Ivory-billed Woodpeckers

Below: Little Blue Heron







plenty, and their relation the Buzzard [probably the Turkey Vulture]. the Pewee Fly Catchers [probably Eastern Phoebes] very busy diving at Insects and Singing Merely — saw several Bald Eagles.”

Late December, 1820 must have dawned extra-brightly for Audubon. After nearly eleven arduous weeks of crawling down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, he had somehow managed to complete 15 new bird drawings - three of which he referred to as “nondescripts” or species completely new to science - working at night by candlelight in flatboat quarters so cramped that a person could not even stand erect inside. On December 26 the flatboat had finally landed at Natchez where Audubon had seized the chance to finally mingle with the first “agreeable people” he had encountered since leaving Cincinnati. Upon arriving at Natchez he first finished a bird drawing that he had been working on, and after cleaning up a bit and donning what was probably his only decent set of “civilized” clothes he hurried to the Natchez Hotel with his portfolio for a networking session. Fortune smiled when the first person he chanced to meet was Nicholas Berthoud, his old river-trading friend and New Orleans connection from Kentucky. Berthoud immediately offered him and Mason a free upgrade onto his keelboat for the remainder of the journey to New Orleans.

Then fortune broke into a broad grin when Berthoud ran into a steamboat captain buddy who invited him to lash his keelboat behind the steamboat Columbia for a free and quick ride down river.

After five days of schmoozing and making several important contacts, Audubon departed Natchez with Berthoud’s keelboat crew on December

Opposite: Wood Ducks

Below: American Oystercatcher



31 just after lunch. It was shortly thereafter that a horrible revelation hit the pit of the artist's stomach - his portfolio of new drawings, plus his only portrait of Lucy, had been left ashore in Natchez. Understandably devastated, on New Year's Day he wrote,

"This day 21 years since I was at Rochefort in France . . . What I have seen, and felt since, would fill a Large Volume – the whole of which would end this Day January 1st 1821. I am on Board a Keel Boat going to New Orleans the poorest man on it -- & what I have seen and felt has brought some very dearly purchased Experience. . . Not Willing to dwell on Ideal futurity, I do not at present attempt to foresee where My Poor Body may be this day 12 Months. . ."

Twenty-three hours after departing Natchez, the steamboat/keelboat tandem arrived at Bayou Sara, just outside of Saint Francisville - a settlement Audubon would come to know and love some six months later. The steamboat had business to attend to there, and cut the keelboat loose. It took the keelboat another six-and-a-half hours to pass Baton Rouge, which Audubon declared *"a Thrifty Villege on the New Orleans State."*

As per usual Audubon had been journaling on every bird he had encountered since leaving Natchez, but his first Louisiana drawing specimens did not come until January 03, after a bad storm had forced the keelboat ashore just below Bayou Lafourche. There, assistant Joseph Mason procured two small birds for Audubon to draw. They turned out to be a pair of Palm Warblers. His naming them the "Yellow Red-poll Warbler" was consistent with Wilson's taxonomy in *American Ornithology*.

Opposite: Palm Warblers

"One Mile below Bayou Lafourche. We Came to... after Chasing the Note of What I supposed a New Bird for a considerable time, I found the deceiving Mocking Bird close by me and Exulting with the Towee Bunting's cheep [Eastern Towhee]—Joseph was more fortunate he Killed Two Warblers one the Red Poll (of this We saw about a dozen) the other I have Not yet ascertained—although in Beautiful plumage.....how Sweet for me to find Myself the 1st [part] of January in a Country where the woods are filled with Warblers, Thrushes, and at the same time see the Rivers and Lakes covered with all Kinds of Watter Birds..."

Indeed, here was where the beauty of winter birding along the Gulf Coast dawned upon Audubon; where North America's Nearctic warbler species (Pine, Palm, Yellow-rumped, Orange-crowned) and Hermit Thrush - along with numerous other songbirds - routinely stop short of the tropics and overwinter with other Nearctics such as ducks, geese, and cormorants, loons, etc., down in the southerly latitudes of the southern



N^o 15. Plate 16.
Published

Yellow Red-bellied Warbler, male
Sylvia pusilla



Deaf, tailed Grackles.
Gracula Naia

Drawn from Nature by John L. Audubon
 From Cassin's sketch. June 4th 1824.

N^o 37

United States. Thus, winter birding along the Gulf Coast includes more than double the number of bird species - and many times more the bird numbers - compared with his previous winter birding experiences in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Ohio.

It was here also that Audubon encountered his first group of “*French Creoles*” that “*Stared at my drawing, and when a little Composed Gazed and Complimented me very Highly*” but “*Neither speak French, English, nor Spanish correctly but have a jargon composed of the Impure parts of these three. . . few of these good natured souls could answer any valuable account of the Country. . .*”

No sooner were they back underway when bad weather again grounded them on January 04, this time near Bonnet Carre’, just above New Orleans. Here, Audubon observed a number of large black and brown songbirds which he initially took to be members of the Cuckoo family, perhaps due to their long tails with graduated plumage. But upon collecting several of them he recognized them to be a species of grackle - Boat-tailed Grackles. Right then and there he executed the first ever drawing of this species in the U.S.

Opposite: Boat-tailed Grackles

The keelboat finally arrived at New Orleans on the morning of Sunday, January 07, 1821. It did not take Audubon long to become utterly underwhelmed by the city. Meeting up with some of Nicholas Berthoud’s friends he was immediately invited to a dinner party where he ended up drinking too much wine and “*had a good dinner and a great deal of Mirth that I call French Gayety that really sickened me. I thought Myself in Bedlam, every body talkd Loud at once and the topics dry Jokes. . .*”

And on the very next day, while watching a parade commemorating the Battle of New Orleans (that final U.S. victory over the British had occurred only seven years prior) his pocketbook was lifted from him. Welcome to New Orleans, John James Audubon.

Only three days after arriving in New Orleans, his target-city and the geographical centerpiece of his grand plan, a stunned Audubon retired back to the keelboat, writing, “*Wished I had remained at Natchez – having found No Work to do remained on Board the Keel Boat opposite the Market, the Dirtiest place in all the Cities of the United States.*”

“The Market,” probably occupying the same spot as today’s French Market on the bank of the Mississippi River in New Orleans’ French Quarter, was loaded with not only fruits and vegetables but also seafood and wild game, including many birds such as wading birds, waterfowl, sandpipers, and songbirds - all to help meet the protein needs of a large city with precious little dry land available for grazing domestic livestock. A typical visit to the market is contained in this January 08, 1821 journal entry:



“at Day breake, went to Market... found Vast Many Malards, some teals, some American widgeons, Canada Geese Snow Geese, Mergansers, Robins; Blue Birds; Red wing Starlings [probably Red-winged Blackbirds] —Tall Tale Godwits [probably Greater Yellowlegs]... a Barred Owl...”

Audubon would peruse the market's contents in search of new birds on a near-daily basis during his entire stay in New Orleans. And it was there at the market where he met local Indians who sold seafood, venison, birds, etc. on a regular basis. Soon, Indians were leading him and Mason up along the banks of nearby bird-rich Bayou Saint John. With his bird-collecting issue at least momentarily satisfied, now all he needed was gainful employment to feed and house Mason and himself, and to send money to his family back in Cincinnati.

Spending the next several unfruitful days in the Crescent City looking for work probably seemed like an eternity to Audubon, but he finally struck pay dirt on January 13 when he was introduced to the Pamar family by his friend Nicholas Berthoud. Impressed by his on-the-spot rendering of one of his daughters, Mr. Pamar invited him to do portraits of his wife and other children. Good word must have gotten around about Audubon's work, because by the end of his first month in town, he had already racked up nearly \$250 in portrait work, with more on the way.

Opposite: Eastern Bluebirds

Below: Upland Sandpipers





And perhaps learning from a local street artist or two, he now routinely boarded steamboats to offer his portraiture services to a more or less captive (and monied) audience, which worked to perfection. Now he was getting work from both passengers and crews.

By early February he had accumulated enough materials and art supplies to paint his masterful rendition of the Brown Pelican, a bird which was considered quite rare around New Orleans at the time: *“Here the hunters call them Grand Gozier and say that seldom more than two are seen together – and only for Short Periods after heavy Gales from the Sea.”*

Indeed, after only a month in town, Audubon wasn’t doing too shabbily with his bird art. On February 17th, he sent completed drawings of twenty species, nearly half of which were not previously described by Alexander Wilson.

“February 15th 1821

...List of Drawings Sent My Beloved Wife February 17...Common Gallinule—Not Described by Willson...Boat Tailed Grakles Male & femelle—Not Described by Willson...Brown Pelican Not Described by Willson, Turkey Hen—Not Described by Willson...”

Audubon was the first American naturalist to extensively describe the ecology of the Wild Turkey, relying chiefly on his observations in Kentucky and Louisiana.

Later, in *Ornithological Biography* he would write:

“The Turkey is irregularly migratory, as well as irregularly gregarious....

About the beginning of October, when scarcely any of the seeds and fruits have yet fallen from the trees, these birds assemble in flocks, and gradually move towards the rich bottom lands of the Ohio and Mississippi. The males...associate in parties of from ten to a hundred, and search for food apart from the females; while the latter are seen either advancing singly, each with its brood of young, then about two-thirds grown, or in connexion with other families, forming parties often amounting to seventy or eighty...all move in the same course...When they come upon a river, they betake themselves to the highest eminences, and there often remain a whole day, or sometimes two, as if for the purpose of consultation...At length... the whole party mounts to the tops of the highest trees, whence, at a signal, consisting of a single cluck, the flock takes flight for the opposite shore. The old and fat birds easily get over, even should the river be a mile in breadth; but the younger and less robust frequently fall into the water, not to be drowned, however, as might be imagined. They bring their wings close to their body, spread out their tail as a support, stretch forward their neck, and, striking out their legs with great vigour, proceed rapidly towards the shore...”

Below: Wild Turkeys



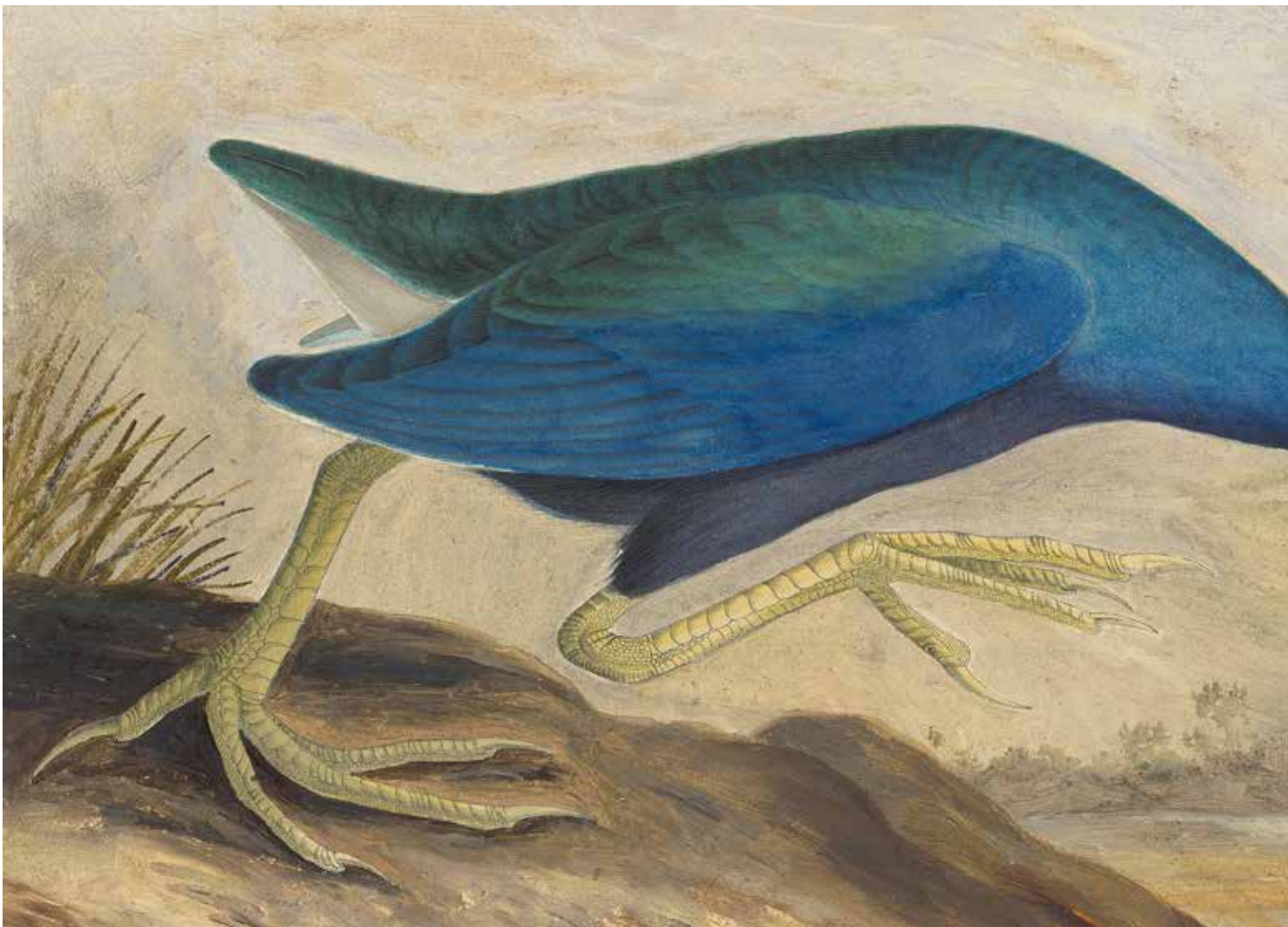


Now, with cash flow established he and Mason could finally move off of the keel boat. Audubon found a room situated near the corner of Barracks and Royal Streets in the French Quarter. It sat between two grocery shops, barricaded from either by “Mere Board Partitions.”

By early April, Audubon’s continuing streak of good fortune gave him possession of his portfolio of bird drawings which he had lost in Natchez some three months earlier. He found the contents “in as good order as the day it Was Lost and Only One Plate Missing,” wisely withholding any complaint.

Complaints were frequently issued throughout Audubon’s journal during his stay in New Orleans. He evidently did not care for the constant gaiety and let-the-good-times-roll attitude of its citizens, and relished company with people who were more restrained, focused and serious in their lives’ pursuits. In this regard, his circle of friends was small: his friend Nicholas Berthoud, a Mr. Gordon who worked at the British Conciliate, and the Pamar family, who had come to love him dearly, and

Below: Purple Gallinule



with whom he had a standing lunch invitation each Sunday. But in short, he did not like New Orleans.

And as his ornithological work became more detailed, his journal also began to contain a fair amount of complaints about Alexander Wilson's bird paintings. Much has been made over this fact by most all of Audubon's biographers - most of which are apparently not birders. Whether by profession or advocacy, birders quickly develop a very critical eye for detail rivaled only by artists - and Audubon was both!

A good example of Audubon's Wilson-complaints comes on his journal entry of Wednesday, April 25, 1821 when he wrote:

"I am forced to Complain of the bad figure that My friend Willson has given of the Warbler I drew yesterday [a Blackpoll Warbler], in the Bill only the length exceed that of Nature 1/8 of an Inch - an enormous difference - and he has runned a broad White line round over the Eye that does not exist."

All birders understand that Audubon was not simply being nit-picky here, for in the world of bird identification, an eighth of an inch difference in bill length on a bird as small as a warbler is indeed an enormous difference - much less the appearance of a white "eyebrow" where one does not exist. Such mistakes could cause much confusion between an inaccurate field guide and a good bird observer attempting to use it!

The same is true of seasonal status and distribution information for birds in different places. Birders depend on good information in order to make accurate identifications. Much of the science of ornithology - and actually all of science - depends upon making accurate observations and constantly correcting previous data that has turned out to be incomplete or in error. This was the crux of the bone that Audubon had to pick with Wilson, who drew his birds primarily from museum specimens, in which colors can fade and bills and legs can shrink. Audubon drew his birds from freshly-collected specimens, wired in life-like forms, and rendered them amidst the same natural surroundings from which they were collected.

His Purple Gallinule work is a perfect example. Audubon's April 23, 1821 illustration of this elegant and abundant water bird with a "Blue baby top" and yellow legs and feet predated its correct identification in the published literature. Of it, he journaled,

"I have experienced a thousand times more pleasure while looking at the Purple Gallinule flirting its tail while gaily moving over the broad leaves of the water-lily, than I have ever done while ... gazing on the flutterings of gaudy fans and the wavings



of flowing plumes. Would that I were once more extended on some green grassy couch, in my native Louisiana, or that I lay concealed under some beautiful tree, overhanging the dark bayou, on whose waters the bird of beauty is wont to display its graceful movements, and the rich hues of its glossy plumage! Methinks I now see the charming creature gliding sylph-like over the leaves that cover the lake, with the aid of her lengthened toes, so admirably adapted for the purpose, and seeking the mate, who, devotedly attached as he is, has absented himself, perhaps in search of some, secluded spot in which to place their nest. Now he comes, gracefully dividing the waters of the tranquil pool, his frontal crest glowing with the brightest azure. Look at his wings, how elegantly they are spread and obliquely raised; see how his expanded tail strikes the water; and mark the movements of his head, which is alternately thrown backward and forward, as if he were congratulating his mate on their happy meeting. Now both birds walk along clinging to the stems and blades, their voices clearly disclosing their mutual feelings of delight, and they retire to some concealed place on the nearest shore, where we lose sight of them for a time....”

Like every other aspect in his life, Audubon’s painting style was a marvel to behold, constantly evolving until he finally hit on the correct formula for rendering birds as life like as possible. In an article for the American Institute for Conservation journal, Reba F. Snyder describes his mature style as “Not merely watercolors . . . but complex works made of a wide variety of media, glazes, papers, and adhesives . . . made and reworked over a 30-year period by Audubon and his assistants.”

Essentially, Audubon’s original pieces are of mixed media. Some were simply drawn with graphite and colored with pastels. But the majority were comprised of combinations of graphite, pastel, and watercolor which he constantly rubbed with his finger or a piece of cork in order to blend the plumage colors into the complex hues that they truly were in real life. To this he would add gouache (a sort of “uber-watercolor” medium he had learned of from New Orleans street artists), ink, and overglazing as needed. His backgrounds were primarily in oils. He always cut and pasted his birds, backgrounds, and accompanying botanical elements done by assistants, onto high quality hard-sized, wove paper. In reality, he was basically creating collages.

Below: Red-Shouldered Hawk. This painting shows Audubon’s mixed media technique of using watercolor, graphite, oil, pastels, ink, collage and chalk. The frog and hawk’s foot are glued onto the drawing.





WEST FELICIANA *Parish!*

Audubon had first become acquainted with Eliza Pirrie when she showed up for art lessons in the late spring of 1821, but it would be a couple of weeks before he met her mother, Lucretia Gray Pirrie, mistress of Oakley Plantation just south of Saint Francisville – about 125 miles upriver from New Orleans. Lucy must have concluded from Eliza that Audubon had much more to offer than simple art lessons. Right on the spot she offered him a residency at Oakley through the summer and fall whereby she'd provide room and board and pay him \$60 per month to

Opposite: Indigo Buntings

Below: Black-billed Cuckoos







tutor Eliza, instructing her in “Drawing, Music, Dancing, Arithmetick, and some trifling acquirements such as Working Hair &c.” She stipulated that he should commit to half a day spent with Eliza, leaving the other half free for him to pursue his birds.

Jumping at the opportunity to get out of New Orleans Audubon immediately accepted. By June 16 he and Mason had arrived at Oakley, journaling:

“the Aspect of the Country entirely New to us distracted My Mind from those objects that are the occupation of My Life [presently, he was suffering a bout of homesickness for Lucy and his boys] – the Rich Magnolia covered with its Odoriferous Blossoms, the Holy [holly], the Beech, the Tall Yellow Poplar, the Hilly ground, even the Red Clay I Looked at with amazement such entire change in so Short a time appears often supernatural, and surrounded once More by thousands of Warblers and Thrushes, I enjoyed Nature. . . the 5 Miles We Walked appeared Short”

Opposite: Downy Woodpeckers

As with the rest of Louisiana, the “Florida parishes” had only recently been ceded to the United States government as a part of the new state of Louisiana in 1812, only nine years prior to Audubon’s arrival there. This region lying just north of Lakes Ponchartrain and Maurepas and New Orleans was much higher in elevation than any of the other lands surrounding that city. Its days as a part of the French Louisiana colony were shortened when France lost the French and Indian War to England in 1758 and ceded it to that country. The territory was known as part of the Province of West Florida and settled by British colonists until the immediate aftermath of the Revolutionary War, when England was forced to cede it to Spain. Spain then got into a protracted legal dispute with the new United States government over the exact location of West Florida’s borders, which ended in 1810 with the “West Florida Revolt” in which the colonists in that territory voted to form the independent Republic of West Florida. With no serious objection from Spain, the Territory of Orleans, now an official U.S. territory, annexed the new republic just prior to being admitted into the Union as the State of Louisiana in 1812.

Unlike the soggy landscapes surrounding New Orleans, lands of the Florida parishes were sandy and drier - and turned out to be perfect for farming truck crops and cattle. And all the way on the far western end of the Florida parishes, lay West Feliciana parish, piled high with loess bluffs, bulldozed by the ancestral Mississippi River ever since its initial deposition some 10,000 years prior. The resulting friability and fertility of these blufflands - identical to that associated with river towns to the immediate north such as Memphis, Vicksburg, and Natchez - allowed

for large expanses of it to be cropped with cotton under the plantation/ slave system, which had made a few families exceedingly wealthy and the entire economy of the southern United States hum along like a spinning top.

Of course Audubon had experience with the flamboyant fringes of plantation culture in New Orleans, but that town was actually operated by cotton merchants, their doctors and lawyers, and a supporting cast of servants and artists who saw to their needs and entertained them. Now he would be plunged headlong into the heart of plantation culture, where the men mostly drank and made frequent “trips to town,” while the women ran the plantation operations and headed their families as well. As with the frivolous “let-the-good-times-roll” culture of New Orleans, the matriarchal flavor of plantation culture did not apparently agree with Audubon either. But the saving grace of this move was far more about the birds than it was about people.

Time must have moved quickly for the remainder of the summer and early fall, for during the four-month duration of his stay at Oakley he provides only six journal entries. Four of the entries were long and strictly ornithological in nature, providing extensive listings and notes on status, distribution, and behavior for over sixty species of local birds that he had encountered there. Most curious was his August 04 entry in which he detailed the collection of a bird “*I Never have Met before.*” He named it the Louisiana Warbler (*Sylvia ludovicianna*) and provided copious notes on its dimensions, appearance and behavior, yet leaves enough crucial details such as breast coloration and the appearance of any markings about the head and face. This makes it very difficult for us to venture an educated guess as to the actual bird species which he had encountered. Moreover, “Louisiana Warbler” does not appear on any of his work in *The Birds of America* or *Ornithological Biography*.

Opposite: Northern Mockingbirds
with Rattlesnake

Beyond ornithological notes, he found only two occasions that merited journal entries. On August 01 he mentions being awakened in the middle of the night to travel to a neighbor’s plantation to draw a “*death likeness*” of a “*Mr. James O’conner.*” Lacking cameras in that era, there was a constant demand for drawings and paintings of family members – especially of children and of deceased relatives. Back in Kentucky Audubon had served as a capable and dependable resource for doing death portraits and was often called upon to execute such work. He possibly had made mention of this fact around the dinner table with the Pirries, and was thus called into action on that particular day.

The second non-ornithological journal entry came on August 25 after he had collected and drawn a large rattlesnake - probably a canebrake





rattlesnake - that measured “5 7/12 feet and Weighed 6 1/4 lb.”

Opposite: Cerulean Warbler

And almost abruptly, next comes an entry dated October 20, 1821 that has him and Mason returning to New Orleans. In this entry he reports that due to prolonged illness Eliza could no longer take lessons from him, and that he was dismissed from Oakley on October 16. Some biographers speculate, or at least imply, that fifteen-year-old Eliza had become a bit too attached to Audubon for Lucy Pirrie’s liking, and that this was the real reason that he was dismissed. In any case, their parting of ways was contentious, with Audubon asking to be compensated for days in which he showed up for work, but which Eliza was unavailable.

Back in New Orleans Audubon remained on-task as ever. He cut his hair, bought a new suit, and set out to draft subscribers and supporters of his work. He also began casting about for a potential publisher for the project. He wrote to his wife, begging her to move down to New Orleans with the boys to assist him with his endeavor. She finally agreed and arrived with John and Victor on December 21, settling into Audubon’s cottage on Dauphine Street. It must have been a wonderful Christmas for the Audubon family that year.

Below: Mississippi Kite



Lucy immediately landed work as a governess in New Orleans, but was soon invited to move to Beech Woods plantation, near Saint Francisville and just north of Oakley. The plantation mistress there, Mrs. Jane Percy, wanted her to set up a school for Beech Woods children as well as those from the surrounding area. Audubon lingered in New Orleans to continue his networking.

After two years of collaboration with Audubon, Joseph Mason took his leave in 1822. The parting was less than pleasant. Later, Mason would complain that Audubon had him sign his botanical works in pencil, while Audubon signed his bird works in ink, obviously implying that Audubon did not plan to give him any credit on their works. In fairness to Audubon, it was not at all unusual for an artist to employ unnamed assistants to help them with their works, a practice that is still common today. Regardless, Mason went back to Cincinnati and enjoyed a long career as a portrait artist and art teacher. Audubon had journaled that Mason painted the best botanical elements of anyone in the U.S. Before *Birds of America* was completed Audubon would go through three other botanical/background artists, but none came close to matching Mason's talent, who had collaborated on 50-57 (depending on source) of Audubon's "*Birds of North America*" works.

In 1823 Audubon was glad to find himself back in Saint Francisville. Doubtlessly spurred on by Lucy, Beech Woods mistress Percy invited Audubon to do portraits of her daughters. Upon his completion of the pieces, Mrs. Percy complained that the skin tones of the girls were too yellow, which sent Audubon into a rage. Thus he was immediately banished from Beech Woods. Unfortunately, he and Victor had both contracted cases of yellow fever (Audubon's second bout since arriving in the U.S.) and Lucy again intervened, begging Jane Percy to allow him to stay while he recovered.

The next year, Audubon set out for Philadelphia, now seriously seeking a publisher. At the time, Philadelphia was still the academic epicenter of the young country; so it was there that he set his sights, hoping to find not only a publisher, but also additional support from the science community there. There he gained two important admirers and supporters in the famous painter Thomas Sully and ornithologist C. L. Bonaparte, nephew of the Emperor himself. But Philadelphia, where Alexander Wilson had gotten his start, was solidly behind Wilson's 1814 nine-volume field guide "*American Ornithology*," with the overwhelming majority of academicians concluding that Audubon was not only an upstart but a poser as well.

Returning to Louisiana in 1825 he found that Lucy had apparently brokered a peace between Mrs. Percy and himself, as the latter now invit-



Opposite: Summer Tanagers





ed him back to Beech Woods to teach drawing, French, music, dancing, and fencing there. Apparently, Lucy had succeeded in turning the Beech Woods school into a substantial success.

By this time, Audubon had come to believe that his best chance for finding a publisher and more substantive support for his work was in Europe. Had he heard what a smashing success Ben Franklin had been there some two generations earlier, presenting himself as a rustic backwoods New World/American philosopher? Maybe so, maybe not. Whatever the case, he now set his sights on England. It took him and Lucy a year to save enough money for the trip; then on May 18, 1826 he sailed out of New Orleans, bound for Liverpool, England.

In the ensuing years, Audubon would make a number of return trips to Louisiana, with a final trip there in 1837 at the age of fifty-two. Still, it would always remain the place that he considered home - just as it was prophetically stamped on his passport back in 1803. Saint Francisville in particular turned out to be perhaps the only place that absolutely grounded him and caused his spirit to soar with inspiration. He would execute over sixty of his bird paintings there - a place he came to refer to as his "*Happyland*." In all, he completed or at least began 167 of the 435 bird plates contained in "*Birds of America*" in Louisiana - more than from any other location.

Opposite: American Redstarts

Below: Yellow-billed Cuckoos



POST *Script*

Forty-one-year-old Audubon landed in the busy port town of Liverpool, England on July 21, 1826, a little more than two months after departing New Orleans. Liverpool had experienced a recent economic boon due to trading in U.S. cotton, effectively becoming Europe's cotton warehouse. Lucy's sister Ann was living there with her husband, so naturally Audubon called upon them first - only to be shunned! Writing to Lucy he concluded: "Ah! That is no riddle, my friend, I have grown poor."

Back in New Orleans he had obtained from a businessman friend - perhaps a cotton merchant - a letter of introduction for presentation to the Rathbone family in Liverpool, themselves wealthy cotton merchants and art collectors. Calling on them with letter in hand, he was graciously received, and probably as astonished as relieved when they eagerly reviewed his portfolio and declared it "splendid." Mrs. Rathbone immediately signed on to become Audubon's first-ever subscriber to "The Birds of America."

From his first visit with the Rathbones, things began to move very quickly for Audubon. By the end of July he would mount his first exhibit in Europe right there in Liverpool, which attracted throngs of visitors eager to view the spectacularly exotic birds of the New World. With his innate spirit of drama and flair for entertainment Audubon immediately fashioned himself into "The American Woodsman," seamlessly taking on the role which he had practiced in solitude and obscurity for so many years. After all that he had been through, the role would reprise quite naturally.

In *"This Strange Wilderness"* Audubon biographer Nancy Plain summarizes this on-the-spot adaptation best: "To the English, Audubon was

Opposite: Carolina Parakeets





as exotic as his birds. He slicked his hair back with bear grease and wore woodsmen's clothes, like a character from the "Last of the Mohicans." Visitors crowded his rooms, and the elite of Liverpool sent their carriages to bring him to formal dinners. In the gleam of candlelight and crystal, he entertained them all. He claimed to have camped out with Daniel Boone. He performed birdcalls and demonstrated the howl of a wolf. . . the artist found that he had a talent for self-promotion."

Three months after arriving in Liverpool, Audubon traveled to Edinburgh, Scotland, home of the University of Edinburgh, one of Great Britain's oldest (1583) academic institutions. It was there that he met engraver William Lizars, who was bowled over upon first viewing Audubon's bird pieces. The two immediately set about planning the production of "The Birds of America," deciding that they could churn out twenty-five prints per year for subscribers who would likewise pay annual subscription rates over the years until they reached a total subscription fee of \$1,000. At twenty-five new birds per year, they figured that the entire production process would take about 16 years.

Once Lizars had completed the first five prints, Audubon took them to London, seeking subscribers. There he found immediate success as well, soon signing up King George IV himself. While there though, he received a letter of resignation from Lizars, who claimed his colorists had gone on strike and suggested that Audubon find another engraver while he was in London. After some days of searching he finally found Robert Havell, Sr., who served as colorist, and his son R. Havell, Jr., the engraver, who would take on the task - and do it not only better, but also faster and cheaper than Lizars.

Opposite: Savannah Sparrows

As in Liverpool and Edinburgh, Audubon made a big splash in London. He was invited to join all sorts of academic societies. He wrote papers for their journals. He lectured. And in order to maintain cash flow, he produced a steady stream of oil paintings of New World creatures and landscapes, easily selling every one of them as they were completed. He then took his show to France, where his work was hailed by noted naturalist Georges Cuvier as "the greatest monument erected by art to nature." There he gained many subscribers including both the present and future kings of France.

Three years into the project, with Lucy complaining that he had missed seeing his sons grow from boys to men, Audubon sailed back to America, arriving in New York in May, 1829. He tarried there, painting birds that he had missed in Kentucky, Ohio, and Louisiana; and didn't depart for the south until fall bird migration was underway. He had accumulated a nice batch of paintings over the summer to send to London to keep the Havells busy. Heading west, he stopped off in Louisville where

his two sons were now working with their uncle Billy Bakewell. While there he must have convinced them that he needed their help in England.

He didn't reach Saint Francisville until mid-November. There, he was reunited at last with his Lucy. Reviewing his great success and the initiation of the production process in London with Lucy, Audubon proposed that she move back there with him to assist in what at last looked to be a financially rewarding project. English native Lucy did not hesitate in saying yes, especially after viewing a few of the Havell engravings that he had brought along. He concluded, *"We should all go to Europe together and to work as if an established Partnership for Life consisting of Husband Wife and Children"*

Lucy would become the general business manager of the operation, as well as copyist and editor for Ornithological Biography. Victor would manage subscriptions, oversee the Havells' work, and as crunch time for the project's completion rolled around, would sit in as Audubon's background/botanical artist. John Woodhouse would shadow his father, help him procure the new birds that he needed, and eventually help him in drawing birds.

He and Lucy departed Louisiana almost immediately, and after a short stay with their sons and relatives in Kentucky, and a meeting with U.S. President Andrew Jackson in Washington (much admired by Audubon ever since he had saved New Orleans and the entire Mississippi Valley from the British some sixteen years earlier), they all sailed for England in April, 1830.

By the time they had reached Great Britain, Audubon had already decided that it was time to get started on the text that would accompany "The Birds of America," which he would entitle "Ornithological Biography," and they settled first back in Edinburgh to begin that process. There was, however, a bit of a caveat involved here. Audubon disliked writing. With his often sarcastic penchant for understatement, he had journaled, *"I would rather go without a shirt or any inexpressibles through the whole of the florida swamps in musquito time than labor as I have hitherto done with the pen."*

It may well have been upon Lucy's suggestion that he decided to hire some writing help. He hired William MacGillivray, a young, eager Scottish naturalist, bird anatomy specialist, and friend of Charles Darwin, to write the technical information (dimensions, plumage descriptions, etc.) for each bird species covered, while he would spin folksy anecdotal tales regarding aspects of each species' habitat, behavior, and other miscellaneous notes captured in his journal and his memory. He would also include a sort of autobiographical narrative, detailing his life and times in the wilds of eastern North America.



Opposite: Blue Grosbeaks



The first volume of *Ornithological Biography* was completed in four months; but production of the entire five-volume work covering 489 total bird species would take nine years to finish.

The next year (1831) Audubon and Johnny returned to the U.S., reuniting with Swiss landscape artist George Lehman (who Audubon had hired to do background painting for him during his 1829 work in the northeastern U.S.) and travel to the Florida Territory in search of new birds. Progress came slowly there, and after they had finished up in the Florida Keys, they sailed straight back north to Maine, then continued up along the coast of Nova Scotia to Labrador, a region yet to be explored by ornithologists. There, with Audubon sketching and painting on, they were stunned by the massive breeding colonies of Northern Gannets and Atlantic Puffins they encountered on the rocky coast and small islands.

He and Johnny would head back to Great Britain in an attempt to finally finish painting and writing. Meanwhile, he also had hired Charleston, South Carolina gardener/artist Maria Martin to do background painting.

Then in 1837, after five more years of hard work in Great Britain, he and Johnny made one more trip to the U.S., and what would be Audubon's final trip to Louisiana, landing in New Orleans in April, smack dab

Below: Great Egret



in the middle of spring bird migration. They immediately boated back down the Mississippi River, emerging through its delta via Southwest Pass, and crept westward paralleling the entire Louisiana coast.

By the time he had reached it in 1837, the entire delta of the lower Mississippi that Audubon encountered was already in transition because the river itself was being altered. Its sweeping and seeping outflows over and into what was a broad coastal delta and its underlying aquifers were being restricted to a narrow and artificial channel.

Plantations and settlements were spreading north, accompanied by construction of artificial levees to contain the annual flood of the Mississippi. Ironically, this northward levee expansion artificially increased the height of the annual flood on the southern portion of the river. That in turn forced an increase in the height of existing levees to the south, further restricting the river and artificially increasing the height of its flood. Further modification of the river and its distributaries would be made in preparation for the Battle of New Orleans and, beginning in 1831, in the removal of log jams along the Red and Atchafalaya Rivers. All of these efforts reduced the Mississippi River's ability to build and maintain the Delta and to recharge the underlying coastal aquifer.

Even so, it would be difficult indeed for present day boaters of the Louisiana coast to imagine, but back then, the unrestricted annual flooding events of the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries had constructed a vast network of marsh and swamplands over the entire lower-third of Louisiana - only a skeleton of which remains today. Bounding these "tidelands" on the south was a near-contiguous strand of barrier islands, where only a few remain today. Sailing was dangerous. Coastal harbors were few. Inlets were shallow. Reefs were abundant. One reef was enormous. It covered more than 1,000 square miles. Spain had mapped this reef in 1785, the year that Audubon was born. It began west of Vermilion Bay, and extended eastward in front of Marsh Island and Atchafalaya Bay, covered Ship Shoal, and protected Last Island, the easternmost barrier island of the Isle Dernieres chain bounding western Terrebonne Bay. It was comprised mostly of oysters. By 1837 much of this reef had already died off due to increased salinity in the nearshore waters.

Now focused on material for Ornithological Biography, Audubon made copious notes on the bird life they encountered along the coast. In his April 6, 1837 letter to John Bachman from Grande Terre Island just east of Grand Isle, Audubon provides us with a glimpse of the island's ecology, and the remains of John Lafitte's stronghold.

"...We anchored safely under the lee of Barataria Island and have been here ever since, shooting & fishing at a proper rate...4 White Pelicans...a great number

of different *Tringas* [i.e. sandpipers], Terns, Gulls &c... We intend to proceed to Cayo Island... said to be a great breeding ground. Not a bat on our island, and only raccoons, otters, wild cats and a few rabbits... Have killed 5 *Tringa himantopus* [Stilt Sandpipers, then referred to as Long-legged Sandpipers]. Marsh terns [Gull-billed Terns] abundant. Cayenne and Common Terns as well. *Larus atricilla* [Laughing Gull] also. White & Brown pelicans and a good variety of Ducks and Florida Cormorant [Neotropic Cormorant]. Few Land birds. Saltwater Marsh Hens and Boat-tailed Grackles breeding. But enough, as I have noted every incident worth notice, which you will read from the journal.... This island... was Lafitte's (the pirate) stronghold. The remains of his fortification... are yet discernable. Some say that much money is deposited thereabouts... The island is flat, and in 1830 it was overflowed by the waves of the Gulf impelled by a hurricane to the depth of 4 feet above the highest ground..."

Opposite: Eastern Kingbirds

As Audubon stood among the driftwood on Grande Terre, he observed two flocks of Stilt Sandpipers feeding in the intertidal. This bird was poorly understood, and largely migratory through the U.S. Later, in *Ornithological Biography*, he elucidates.

"I have often spoken of the great differences as to size and colour that are observed in birds of the same species, and which have frequently given rise to mistakes..."

On the morning of the 4th of April, 1837 ... I saw a flock of about thirty Long-legged Sandpipers alight within ten steps of me, near the water ... following the margin of the retiring and advancing waves, in search of food ... by probing the wet sand in the manner of Curlews.... it was pleasing to see the alacrity with which they simultaneously advanced and retreated, according to the motions of the water. In about three quarters of an hour ... they removed a few yards beyond the highest wash of the waves, huddled close together, and began to plume and cleanse themselves. All of a sudden they ceased their occupation, stood still, and several of them emitted a sharp tweet-tweet, somewhat resembling the notes of Totantus solitaires [Solitary Sandpiper]..... Their passage through the United States is very rapid, both in spring and autumn. Some few spend the winter in Lower Louisiana, but nearly all proceed southward beyond the Texas...."

A couple of weeks later, snugly anchored in Cote Blanche Bay, an ecstatic and unshaven Audubon continues his coastal correspondence, this time with his Scottish writing partner William MacGillivray. Below he gives us a last view of the vast offshore oyster reefs.

"On Board the Crusader, Cote Blanche, 18th April 1837.

...we made our way ... by a narrow and somewhat difficult channel The



N^o 16. Plate 79.
Published 1830. -
April 15th 1822. -



Orchard Oriole — 1st. Male in complete plumage.
Tolurus sparvus 2nd. Male of the same
 and 1st. Year.
 Plant Vulture — 1st. Male in complete plumage.
 the 1st. Year.

No 9. Plate 12.
 1826.

John J. Audubon

shores around us are entirely formed of a bank, from twenty to thirty feet high, of concrete shells of various kinds, among which the Common Oyster, however, predominates ... so white that it might well form a guiding line...even in the darkest nights.

The crossing of large bays, cumbered with shallow bars and banks of oyster-shells, is always to me extremely disagreeable, and more especially when all these bars and banks do not contain a single living specimen of that most delectable shell-fish... But now in single file, like culprits or hungry travelers, we proceed along the margin of the canal. Ah, my dear friend, would that you were here just now to see the Snipes innumerable, the Blackbirds, the Gallinules, and the Curlews that surround us...listen, as I now do, to the delightful notes of the Mocking-bird, pouring forth his soul in melody as the glorious orb of day is fast descending...watch the light gambols of the Night Hawk, or gaze on the Great Herons, which, after spreading their broad wings, croak aloud as if doubtful regarding the purpose of our visit to these shores!"

Opposite: Orchard Orioles

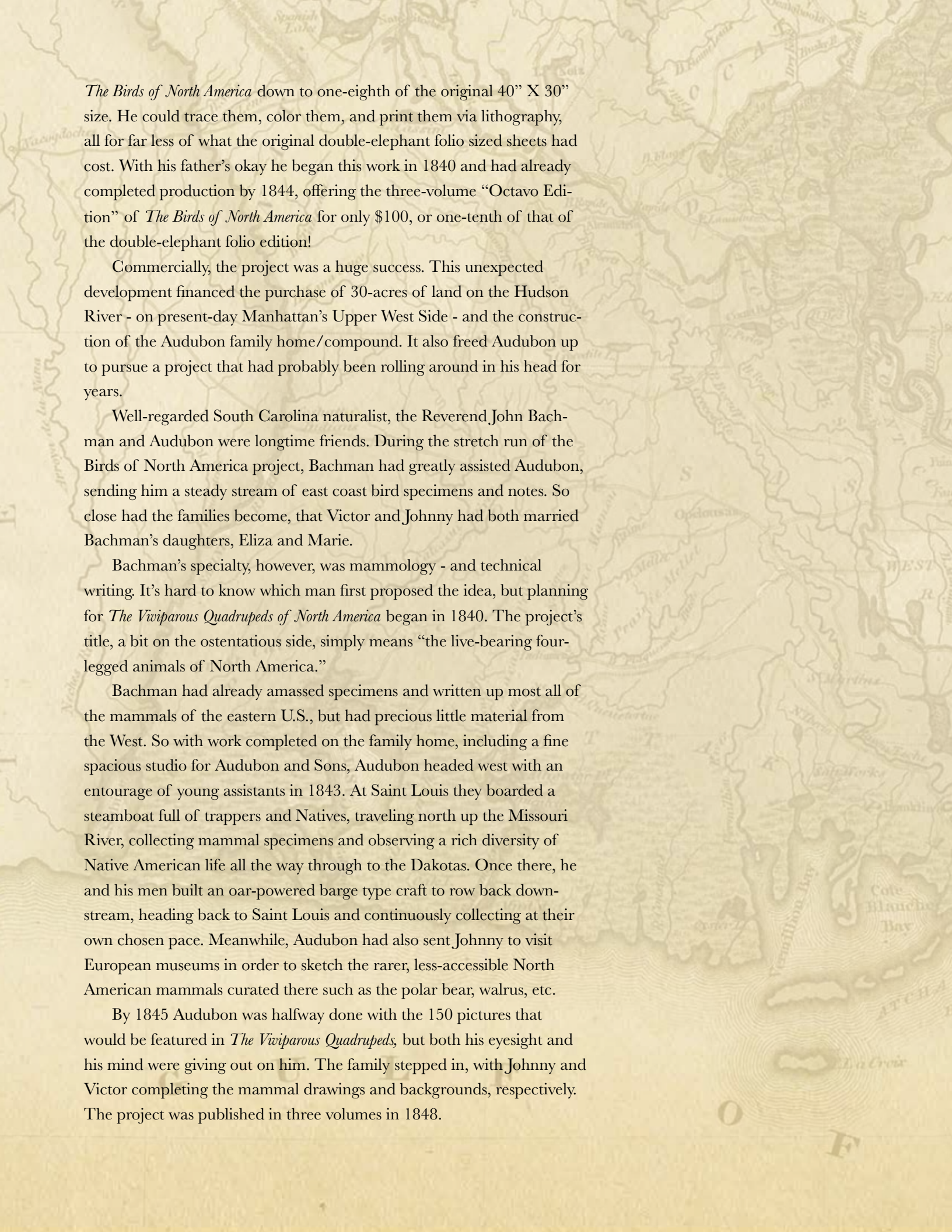
By the end of that summer, the *Birds of America* was nearly finished. Birdwise, all that Audubon lacked were sketches of bird specimens from the western U.S. territories that had recently been brought in to east coast museums by ornithologists John Townsend and Thomas Nuttall during their respective trips westward.

The workload of the entire family ratcheted up to a feverish level on both sides of the Atlantic. It is said that during this hectic time, even Lucy had to pitch in and finish the drawing and coloring of the publication's Swamp Sparrow! George Lehman contributed the Lesser Yellowlegs; and Johnny would do several birds as well, most notably the American Bittern.

Finally, though, the last numbered edition of engraved prints was completed and published in 1838 - twelve years after work had begun - but four years ahead of the schedule that Audubon and Lizars had originally planned back in 1826. Strong teamwork by both the Audubons and the Havells had made all the difference.

Meanwhile, Audubon's fame had gradually caught on in America, once newspapers began reporting on his own recent travels there. Now, his U.S. subscription listing for *The Birds of America* included luminaries such as Daniel Webster and the writer Washington Irving, along with most universities, state governments, the U.S. Congress, and even Alexander Wilson's old stronghold, the prestigious Philadelphia Academy of Sciences.

In 1839 the final volume of *Ornithological Biography* was published, and the Audubons immediately returned to New York. Fifty-four-year-old John James Audubon was apparently not quite ready for a rocking chair. First, Johnny had recently discovered a way to project the images from



The Birds of North America down to one-eighth of the original 40" X 30" size. He could trace them, color them, and print them via lithography, all for far less of what the original double-elephant folio sized sheets had cost. With his father's okay he began this work in 1840 and had already completed production by 1844, offering the three-volume "Octavo Edition" of *The Birds of North America* for only \$100, or one-tenth of that of the double-elephant folio edition!

Commercially, the project was a huge success. This unexpected development financed the purchase of 30-acres of land on the Hudson River - on present-day Manhattan's Upper West Side - and the construction of the Audubon family home/compound. It also freed Audubon up to pursue a project that had probably been rolling around in his head for years.

Well-regarded South Carolina naturalist, the Reverend John Bachman and Audubon were longtime friends. During the stretch run of the *Birds of North America* project, Bachman had greatly assisted Audubon, sending him a steady stream of east coast bird specimens and notes. So close had the families become, that Victor and Johnny had both married Bachman's daughters, Eliza and Marie.

Bachman's specialty, however, was mammology - and technical writing. It's hard to know which man first proposed the idea, but planning for *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* began in 1840. The project's title, a bit on the ostentatious side, simply means "the live-bearing four-legged animals of North America."

Bachman had already amassed specimens and written up most all of the mammals of the eastern U.S., but had precious little material from the West. So with work completed on the family home, including a fine spacious studio for Audubon and Sons, Audubon headed west with an entourage of young assistants in 1843. At Saint Louis they boarded a steamboat full of trappers and Natives, traveling north up the Missouri River, collecting mammal specimens and observing a rich diversity of Native American life all the way through to the Dakotas. Once there, he and his men built an oar-powered barge type craft to row back downstream, heading back to Saint Louis and continuously collecting at their own chosen pace. Meanwhile, Audubon had also sent Johnny to visit European museums in order to sketch the rarer, less-accessible North American mammals curated there such as the polar bear, walrus, etc.

By 1845 Audubon was halfway done with the 150 pictures that would be featured in *The Viviparous Quadrupeds*, but both his eyesight and his mind were giving out on him. The family stepped in, with Johnny and Victor completing the mammal drawings and backgrounds, respectively. The project was published in three volumes in 1848.

Opposite: Portrait of John James Audubon painted by his son John Woodhouse Audubon



That same year, John Bachman traveled to New York to visit Audubon, and found “his noble mind all in ruins.” Audubon would spend his final six years wandering the grounds of his “Minniesland” (the Audubon estate name adapted from his sons’ nickname of endearment for Lucy) suffering from dementia. He finally succumbed in the winter of 1851 at the age of sixty-six years.

Not long afterward, Lucy made a very wise decision in allowing the New York Historical Society and Harvard’s Houghton Library to purchase all of her husband’s original works, where they would be properly preserved and curated for posterity. The illustrations presented in this publication are some of those “original works” - most notably those drawn while Audubon was in Louisiana.

Quotes from Audubon’s journal and letters have been presented throughout in italics, allowing appreciation of the unedited text.



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