

# *Fine Bird Books*



*A Selection of Nineteenth Century Plates*

*On Display Through September 30, 1992*

*Department of Special Collections*

*Room 403 Parks Library*

*Iowa State University*

*8:00-11:50 a.m. and 1:00-5:00 p.m.*

*Monday through Friday*

The Department of Special Collections is fortunate to have a number of 19th Century illustrated bird books. These books, filled with hand-colored plates, were produced at a time when there was tremendous interest in the descriptions of new species of birds. At the same time, a new printing technique, lithography, made illustration of new species a simpler process. This combination of art and science resulted in lovely volumes like those on display.

When we became aware of the American Ornithologists' Union meeting to be held on the Iowa State campus in June of 1992, we decided that it would be an excellent opportunity to showcase these materials. The works of some of the most prominent bird illustrators were chosen: Richard Bowdler Sharpe, Henry Eeles Dresser, Charles Lucien Bonaparte, John Gould, Daniel Giraud Elliot and of course, John James Audubon. In addition, Archivist Ann Kenne has prepared a bibliography of books on ornithology which the Department owns. Copies of the bibliography are available upon request in the Department.

Brochure text by Becky Jordan  
Cover illustration taken from The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography

Exhibit Catalog #48

### John James Audubon (1785-1851)

Audubon's name is practically synonymous with birds in the United States. His life is shrouded in romantic imagery that he himself, and later his family, helped to promote. The Dictionary of American Biography says that Audubon, "Perhaps the most popular naturalist of America, has so long been a figure of sentiment and idealism, and as a man and as a scientist has suffered so from the touching up of enthusiastic biographers, that it has been difficult to divorce the romance of fiction from that of truth in what was in any case a most colorful and adventurous life."

Audubon was born in 1785 in Les Cayes, Santo Domingo (now part of Haiti). He was the son of Jean Audubon and Jeanne Rabin, a chambermaid at a plantation near Audubon's own. Jean Audubon, who was married to a woman in France, was also involved in a liaison with another woman, Catherine Bouffard, with whom he had three daughters. The elder Audubon eventually brought home his son, Jean and later his youngest daughter, Rose, to his wife, Anne Moynet Audubon. The Audubons adopted both children, and Anne raised them.

Audubon had an indulgent upbringing, and often neglected his studies to go wandering in the woods in search of birds. At the age of 18, his father sent him to his estate near Philadelphia, in hopes that he would become a businessman. Audubon, however, regarded the area as a "blessed spot, where hunting, fishing and drawing occupied my every moment." (This fascination with nature served Audubon badly in every business venture he ever attempted). While in Pennsylvania, he met his future wife, Lucy Bakewell, whose father owned the estate adjoining the Audubon home, Mill Grove.

Audubon married Lucy Bakewell in 1808, and they moved to Kentucky. A number of business failures followed, in Kentucky and later in Ohio. Eventually he determined to make his living as an artist. In October of 1820 he set off on a series of expeditions, drawing birds, making a meager living painting portraits for \$5.00 apiece. In 1824 he returned to Philadelphia, seeking a publisher for his work. He was not successful, but was advised by Charles Lucien Bonaparte to go to England. This he did, and eventually published his Birds of America by subscription from 1827-1838. A 5 volume companion text, entitled Ornithological Biography was written in collaboration with William McGillivray, and was published from 1831 to 1839.

Audubon returned to the United States in 1839. In the last 12 years of his life he produced a smaller edition of Birds of America (published 1840-1844). He also began, with John Bachman, Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America. Failing health prevented his completion of this project, and the plates were finished by his son, John Woodhouse Audubon. Audubon died at his home on the Hudson, Minnie's Land, on January 27, 1851.

## Birds of America

The books on display are two volumes of the edition of Birds of America published about 1871 by G. R. Lockwood in New York. This edition and the 1840-1844 edition are much smaller than the original folio edition, which had pages two feet wide and three feet long. At the time of its publication, (1831-1839) the "elephant folio" sold for about \$1,000.

## **Richard Bowdler Sharpe (1847-1909)**

Richard Bowdler Sharpe died at Chiswick on the 25th of December, 1909, at the age of sixty-two. To the general public he was best known as the head of the Bird Department of the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, though, strictly speaking, this was not the official designation of the post which he so long occupied. To students and fellow workers throughout the world he was much more than this; for his profession was his hobby, and he worked at it with such unremitting energy and devotion as to distance all competitors in the amount and quality of the scientific work which he achieved. In his study of the vast collections under his charge he acquired an unrivalled knowledge of the bird-life of the world, estimated to include more than 18,000 species, almost any one of which he could name at sight, except in the case of closely allied forms, which would necessitate comparison with others. Further than this, he could tell offhand the particular part of the world from which it came, and approximately the limits of its geographical distribution. In addition, he could point out its characteristic habits, its affinities, and peculiarities of structure in such a way as to astonish those who came to him for information.

The Ibis  
April 1910

Richard Bowdler Sharpe was born in London in 1847, the son of Thomas Bowdler Sharpe, publisher of Sharpe's London Magazine. He was educated in England, and after leaving school he joined the publishing firm of W. H. Smith and Son. Later he spent a year with the bookseller Bernard Quaritch, then in 1867 he was appointed Librarian to the Zoological Society of London. It was during his time at the Society that Sharpe began to publish the results of his ornithological studies, including A Monograph of the Alcedinidae. He also collaborated with Henry Eeles Dresser on the first fifteen parts of The Birds of Europe.

In 1872, Sharpe joined the Department of Zoology at the British Museum as Senior Assistant. He remained with the Museum for the rest of his career, being promoted to Assistant Keeper of the Department in 1895. As part of his work, he undertook the Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum. This was a monumental task, eventually numbering 27 volumes, of which 11 were written entirely by Sharpe. Outside of his work he published a number of other books, and completed the volumes John Gould had left incomplete at the time of his death. Sharpe also wrote numerous scientific papers.

Sharpe's abilities at securing collections were also of great help to the British-Museum. On one occasion he traveled to India to supervise the packing and transportation of a collection containing 63,000 birds, 18,500 eggs and 500 mammals. During Sharpe's tenure, the Museum's bird and egg collections increased from less than 35,000 specimens to 400,000.

The record of Sharpe's contribution is a very fine one. He was held in high regard by his colleagues, and this is shown by this closing comments from the obituary published in the Ibis:

The services thus rendered to science by Dr. Sharpe, in the care of and enormous increase to the collections under his charge, in the valuable Catalogue of Birds already referred to, besides a subsequent 'Hand-list of Birds' in five volumes, and in the numerous monographs and papers of importance which were independently published by him, are such as have never been achieved by one man in his lifetime...

#### A Monograph of the Alcedinidae: or Family of Kingfishers.

Richard Bowdler Sharpe began work on this book at the age of 16 and was only 21 when its publication was begun. The illustrations are by John Gerrard Keulemans, who Sharpe had met while visiting Hermann Schlegel at the Leyden Museum. Keulemans had worked at the Leyden Museum for some years but moved to London after beginning the work on this monograph. A Monograph of the Alcedinidae was published from 1868 to 1871.

#### Daniel Giraud Elliot (1835-1915)

Daniel Giraud Elliot was born in 1835 in New York City. Early in life he developed an interest in natural history, and he began collecting birds while still a boy. He had planned to attend Columbia, but his health was judged too delicate. Instead, he traveled to places with mild climates, including the Middle East, the West Indies and Brazil. It was only the beginning of his travels, which led him all over the world.

At the beginning of his career, Elliot concentrated primarily on ornithology. He moved to London for an extended period of study in 1869, and maintained his residence there until 1883. During this time, he had a commission from the American Museum of Natural History in New York to purchase items for their collections. He returned to the United States in 1883.

By the time Elliot moved to England, his writing career was well under way. His first publication was a paper for The Ibis of October 1859, "Descriptions of Six New Species of Birds." By the time he went to England in 1869, he had published a number of other papers and had prepared four books in folio format. The artwork in the earliest books was executed by Elliot himself. For later publications, he employed two renowned bird illustrators, John Gerard Keulemans and Josef Wolf. He continued to write and publish while living in London.

In 1894, Elliot was named curator of zoology at the Field Museum in Chicago. Though he had been closely associated in an advisory capacity with the American Museum of Natural History for many years, the curatorship at the Field Museum was the only paid position as a naturalist he ever held. While in Chicago, he led two collecting expeditions on behalf of the Museum. One of these, to Africa, was unfortunately cut short due to an illness, but still provided a basis for exhibits in the Museum, and papers on the explorations.

After leaving the Field Museum in 1906, Elliot embarked on an 18 month world tour to do research in connection with his last major work, Review of the Primates, which was published by the American Museum of Natural History in 1913. He died two years later at the age of 80.

#### A Monograph or Family of the Pheasants

On exhibit is volume one of this two-volume set, for which Elliot acted as his own publisher. In fact his home address, 27 West 33rd Street in New York, is listed on the title page. The illustrations were done by Josef Wolf, and the lithographic work was done by John Gerard Keulemans. This publication is very beautiful, but their large size prompted these remarks by A. H. Palmer in his biography of Josef Wolf:

[The books form] "an edition de luxe; that is to say they in every way promote the discomfort of the would-be reader; who, in heaving them up on the table, involuntarily wishes that the author's expenses had not been quite so liberally allowed."

#### A Monograph of the Bucerotidae

This book on the hornbills came out in 1882 during the time period Elliot was living in London. It was published by subscription and was dedicated to Osbert Salbin "as a mark of esteem for his abilities as an ornithologist and in testimony of a friendship of many years." In his preface, Elliot explained why he chose to do a monograph on the hornbills, which are not the most beautiful of birds:

Could an interest in any ornithological group only be created by the beauty of dress or gracefulness of form of its various members, -it might possibly happen that the Bucerotidae would not be selected as the subject for an illustrated monograph; and while their full value is always accorded to these attributes, perhaps occasionally even in an exaggerated degree, yet as Nature never made an ugly object (even the most repulsive thing so called being admirably and wonderfully fitted for the place it is destined to fill in life), beauty of plumage and symmetry of form are by no means the only causes that lead a naturalist to choose any one group as an especial object for study. The very peculiar appearance of the majority of the birds contained in this volume, as well as the extraordinary habits and structure common to all, which make them to differ from other feathered creatures, together with the generally meagre accounts of many of the species, only to be met with by searching numerous publications, were the chief reasons that induced me to select this family as the subject of my fifth illustrated monograph.

#### **Henry Eeles Dresser (1838-1915)**

Dresser was born in Thirsk, Yorkshire, England in May of 1838. His was a family of businessmen. His grandfather established the Thirsk Bank, and his father was a timber merchant. Dresser was educated at a private school in Kent and a German school near Hamburg. He then entered his fathers business and during the Civil War delivered a cargo to Texas during the northern blockade. (His first scientific paper, published in The Ibis in 1865 was titled "Notes on the Birds of Southern Texas."). He set himself up as an iron and steel merchant in 1869 or 1870. His business interests did not seem to interfere with his ornithology however, and he was a frequent contributor to The Ibis from 1865 to 1909. He also authored five books, of which History of the Birds of Europe is considered the most important.

Like most naturalists, Dresser's interest in birds developed at an early age. He began collecting bird-skins and eggs while he was studying in Germany. He ultimately developed a collection of 12,000 bird skins, primarily of the Palaearctic birds. (Palaearctic refers to Europe, Asia north of the Himalayas, the northern Arabian Peninsula and Africa north of the Sahara). This collection was eventually placed in the Manchester Museum.

Dresser acted as his own publisher, and the hallmark of his work was accuracy. This can be seen in the explanation found in the preface of A Monograph of the Coraciidae. This book was intended as a companion work to A Monograph of the Meropidae, and was ready for the printers in 1890. However, Dresser's friend and colleague, Richard Bowdler Sharpe, was just completing the portion of the British Museum Catalogue concerning the Coraciidae or Rollers. Dresser waited until this was complete so he could verify his own work by comparing it with Sharpe's. The differences were slight and the book was published in 1893.

### A Monograph of the Meropidae, or Family of the Bee-Eaters.

This book was published in parts by subscription, 1884-1886. Little was known of these birds prior to the 1880s. Found primarily in the tropics, they nest in holes in the ground and have a graceful flight similar to that of the swallow.

### A Monograph of the Coraciidae, or Family of the Rollers

As mentioned above, this book was designed as a companion volume to A Monograph of the Meropidae. John Gerrard Keulemans did the artwork for both books and they are considered some of the best examples of his autolithographic work. (Autolithography is a method of lithography where the artist makes his original drawing directly on the printing surface).

### **John Gould (1804-1881)**

John Gould is considered second only to John James Audubon as a bird illustrator. He was born in Dorsetshire, England, in 1804, first child of a family with few resources. His father worked as a gardener, during a time in England when gardening was enjoying increasing popularity among the wealthy. The elder Gould held several different gardening jobs during his son's childhood, each better than the last, until in 1818, he was appointed foreman gardener at Windsor Castle. John Gould apparently assisted his father in the gardens, for later in life he was known to remark, "I've gathered many a bunch of dandelions for Queen Charlotte's German salads." During his time at Windsor Castle, Gould took up taxidermy, then a popular decorative craft.

It was thought that John Gould would follow his father's trade and to that end, about 1822, he was sent to work at Ripley Castle in Yorkshire to learn the art of forcing bulbs. From Ripley Castle he went to London to set himself up as a taxidermist. He was apparently successful in this work, and in 1827 he won a competition for the post of "Curator and Preserver" for the Zoological Society of London. He was to remain connected with the Society all his life, but he stopped working directly for them in 1837, to prepare for a collecting trip to Australia.

It was at the Zoological Society that Gould encountered the materials which would inspire his first work. In 1830, the Society acquired a collection of bird skins from the Himalayas. Gould quickly saw that there would be interest in a publication based on these exotic birds, but could not find a publisher willing to take on the project. He decided to publish the book himself, and with the artistic assistance of his wife, Elizabeth Coxen Gould, he embarked on the field that would bring him both fortune and renown.



John Gould was not himself a talented artist--his great ability was organizational. He brought together the bird specimens, received from several collectors abroad, had them mounted, and made pencil and watercolor sketches of them, usually depicting the male and female of each species. His original sketches were rough and covered with copious notes regarding details to be supplied by the lithographer. Elizabeth Gould did the lithographic work on A Century of Birds Hitherto Unfigured from the Himalayan Mountains. She was later assisted by Edward Lear (who is now primarily remembered for his limericks). After Elizabeth Gould's death in 1841, most of Gould's lithographic work was done by Henry Richter and William Hart.

Gould supervised the production of forty-one folio volumes over the course of his lifetime, illustrated by 2,999 plates. He also published approximately three hundred papers in scientific journals. He was a man of great energy and perseverance, and he continued working actively until his death, though he was in failing health for a number of years. After his death in 1881, the Duke of Westminster wrote to Gould's daughters these words: "he has left a permanent pleasure, in his delightful books, for thousands and an enduring monument of his own industry and ability."

### The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle

The book on display is Part III of the description of the zoology observed on the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle, edited by Charles Darwin. Darwin's later development of the theory of evolution based on the species seen during the Beagle's five year trek makes it in retrospect a great scientific event. However, the excitement that greeted the ship's return in 1836 had mostly to do with the many specimens collected of animals that had never been seen in England, as well as new information gained regarding trade routes.

On January 4, 1837, Darwin brought the birds and mammals he had collected to the Zoological Society of London to be identified. Later that month, Gould wrote to Sir William Jardine, "I must not omit to tell you that Mr. Darwin's Collection of Birds (made during the late survey under Capn FitzRoy) are exceedingly fine; they are placed in my hands to describe; some of the forms are very singular particularly those from the Gallipagos. I have one family of ground finches in which there are 12 or 14 species all new."

John Gould made the sketches for the illustrations in this volume and the lithography was done by Elizabeth Gould. Gould also wrote the descriptions of the new species for Darwin, but these were left incomplete because of Gould's preparations for his collecting trip to Australia. Darwin, with the assistance of Gould's secretary and an assistant in the Zoological Department of the British Museum, fleshed out the descriptions to complete the volume.

## Charles Lucien Bonaparte (1803-1857)

Though Charles Lucien Bonaparte's lasting fame has been as a zoologist, the politics of his very famous family affected his life from the time of his birth. He was born in Paris in May 1803 to Alexandrine de Bleschamp and Lucien Bonaparte. The secret marriage of Bonaparte's parents five months later infuriated his uncle Napoleon. Napoleon, already planning to name himself emperor, had hoped for his brother to make a useful political alliance with Maria Luisa, widow of the king of Etruria. On at least one occasion, Napoleon demanded that Lucien divorce Alexandrine, offering to make him French royalty in return. The discord over the marriage resulted in the Lucien Bonaparte family's removal to Italy.

Later there were four years in exile in England. During the stay in England, Charles Bonaparte began to take an interest in zoology, which he continued to study after the family's return to Italy in 1814.

In 1822, Bonaparte married his cousin Zenaide, daughter of the former king of Naples and Spain, Joseph Bonaparte. Though Napoleon approved of this union, it was not to be a happy one, and at the time of Zenaide's death in 1854, they had lived apart for some time. After their marriage, the couple went to the United States to visit Zenaide's father, who lived on a large estate outside Philadelphia. Here Bonaparte began his career as a naturalist in earnest. He joined the Academy of Sciences of Philadelphia, and articles he authored can be found in the Academy's Journal for 1824. It was also during his stay in Pennsylvania that he began The American Ornithology, published 1825-1833.

The Bonapartes returned to Europe in 1826 and settled in Rome in 1828, where they remained for twenty years. During this time Bonaparte published a book on the birds and animals of Italy (Iconografia della Fauna Italica, 1832-1841). He also became interested in the classification of vertebrates, and hoped to establish a permanent system of zoological groups. Bonaparte also was involved in Italian politics and was a leader of the Radical party, later becoming vice president of the legislative council of the Roman Constituent Assembly. This Italian republic was to fall to his cousin on July 3, 1849. Bonaparte fled to France, but Louis Napoleon ordered him to leave the country. When he did not go of his own accord, he was arrested and compelled to embark for England. Louis Napoleon eventually relented, and Bonaparte returned and made Paris his home. He was in failing health the last few years of his life, and was working desperately to complete Volume 2 of his Conspectus Generum Avium. Sadly, he was not to finish before his death in July of 1857, but the book was published later that year under the editorship of Hermann Schlegel.

Charles Bonaparte was well known to his fellow zoologists in England, France, Germany and Italy and was a member of scientific societies in all these countries. He worked hard in his chosen field, and appreciation

of this is reflected in the obituary to be found in the 1858 Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London:

[His] extreme ardor in the pursuit of science, and the unremitting attention which he devoted to it, increasing even as his physical powers gave way were his most striking characteristics...his labours have contributed largely to our knowledge of the faunas of Europe and North America...to the improvement of their systematic arrangement, to the establishment of many well-marked genera, and to the distinction and description of a multitude of new or imperfectly - known species. Of his conduct in public life it is not my business to speak; but I only echo the general sentiment in saying that in private he was amiable and estimable, a warm friend and an agreeable companion.

Thomas Bell, President of  
the Linnean Society,  
May 24, 1858

American Ornithology; or the Natural History of Birds Inhabiting the United States.

This book was designed to complement an earlier work by Alexander Wilson, American Ornithology; or, The Natural History of the Birds of the United States, published in Philadelphia by Bradford and Inskeep, 1808-1814. Bonaparte incorporated recently discovered species and the females and young of species commonly known but not yet described. He also made revisions of Wilson's nomenclature. American Ornithology was published in Philadelphia from 1825-1833 by Carey, Lea and Carey.