



*Early Birds:
A Selection
of Bird Books
from Belon
to
Audubon*





Gigantic Crane.

*EARLY BIRDS:
A SELECTION OF
BIRD BOOKS
FROM
BELONG TO AUDUBON*

An Exhibition

at

The Rare Book & Manuscript Library

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
30 January—2 March 2009

**Curated By
Alvan Bregman**



©2009 The Rare Book & Manuscript Library
University of Illinois Board of Trustees



EARLY BIRDS



This exhibition of bird books provides background to a companion exhibition of plates from The Rare Book & Manuscript Library's copy of John J. Audubon's "Double Elephant" folio, *Birds of America*. On display here are some of the earliest bird books and many other important ornithologies produced up to and including Audubon. The charm of the subject matter makes these books attractive, but these works were designed primarily to make contributions to natural history. Nomenclature, for example, was one of the most difficult issues facing early modern naturalists. The vernacular names of birds had to be reconciled with those described in classical sources. Exploration, moreover, meant also trying to compare specimens from exotic lands to the illustrations and descriptions at hand. Hopping through this exhibition as a tour guide is our familiar Cardinal, which was presented in varying ways in these books. Here you will also see the various techniques which were used successively over time in the illustrations, including wood-blocks, engravings and lithographs.

Alvan Bregman, Curator of Rare Books

1. Belon, Pierre, 1517?-1564. *L'histoire de la nature des oyseaux: avec leurs descriptions, & naïfs portraits retirez du naturel*. Paris: Guillaume Cauellat, 1555. Q. 598.2 B418h



This is the earliest of the illustrated bird books. It contains some 160 woodcuts produced by Pierre Gourdelles, based on specimens that Belon collected during his travels and on Belon's own drawings. The work consists of a general treatise and six sections, each describing a different category of bird defined mainly by their habitat. The opening (see also front cover) displays two owls, identifying them in Greek, Latin, and French.

2. Gesner, Konrad, 1516-1565. *Historiæ animalium liber III. qui est De auium natura*. Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1555. Q. 598.2 G33h

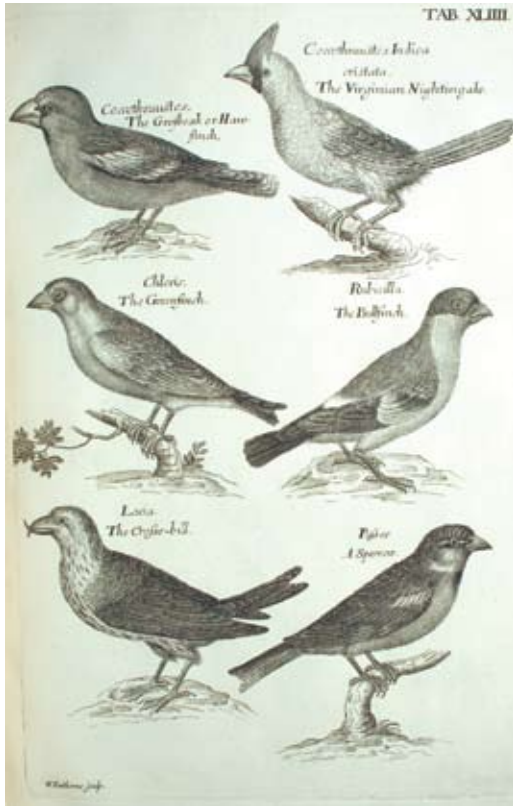
Konrad Gesner's *Histories of Animals* was the first great illustrated encyclopedia of the natural world. The third volume, devoted to birds, appeared in 1555. The library's copy is hand-colored, probably as issued by order from the bookseller's studio. Displayed is a rather fabulous depiction of the "Urogallo" or Cock-of-the-Wood. A hand-written note in pencil states that this is the "Capercaillie. North of Scotland. Two killed by Prince Albert in September 1842 in Breadalbane when on a visit to that Kingdom with Queen Victoria."



3. Aldrovandi, Ulisse, 1522-1605? *Ornithologiae, hoc est, De auiibus historiae libri XII*. Bologna: Franciscus de Francisci, 1599. Q. 598.2 A122o

This is the first of three volumes on birds that Aldrovandi produced from 1599 to 1603 for his monumental *Natural History*. Building on the work of Gesner, he added new topics under which his birds were discussed, describing not only the physical and social attributes of each bird, but its medical and culinary uses, means of hunting and capture, its symbolic and narrative use in art and literature, and so on. The opening shows a nest of "Galbulæ" (Jacamars).





4. Willughby, Francis, 1635-1672. *Ornithologiae libri tres*. London: Joannis Martyn, 1676. Q. 598.2 W682o

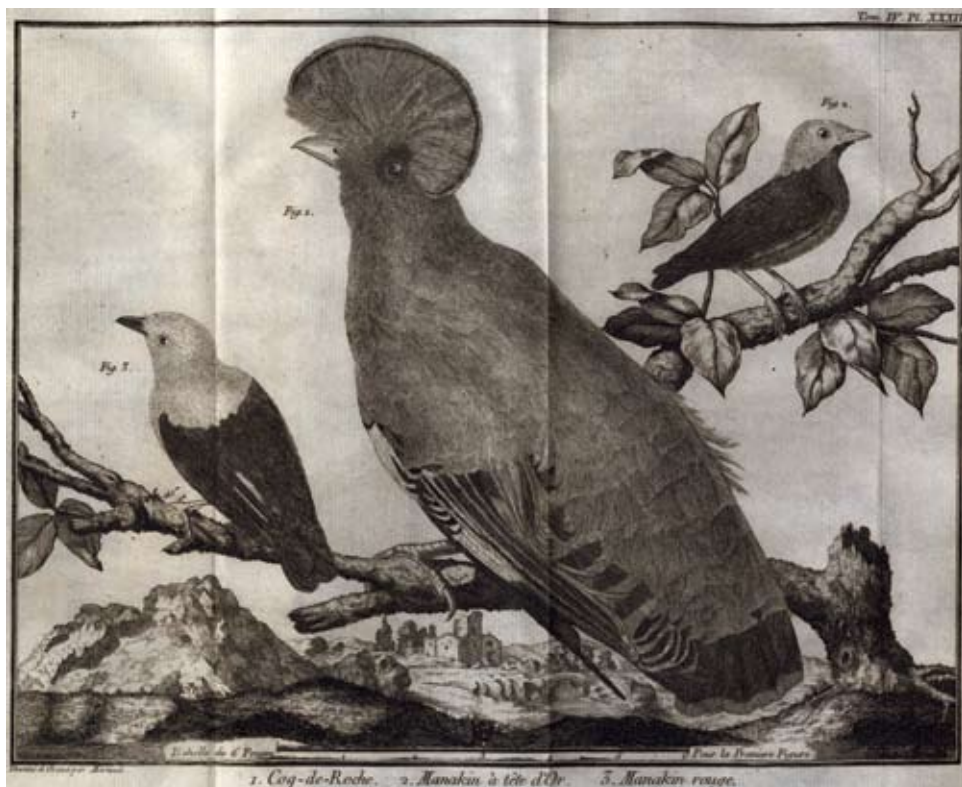
The work of Francis Willughby was important in advancing the taxonomical study of birds. He carried out naturalist tours of England and the Continent with his friend and colleague, John Ray (1627-1705). Upon Willughby's early death, Ray edited and expanded his friend's work on birds for posthumous publication. In the description of the "Virginia Nightingale"—which we now know as the Cardinal—as for other birds displayed in the plates, Willughby and Ray refer back to Belon, Gesner, and Aldrovandi, as well as the authorities of their own day.

5. Olina, Giovanni Pietro, fl. 1622. *Vcelliera, ouero, Discorso della natura, e proprieta di diuersi vcelli, e in particolare di que'che cantano*. Rome: M. Angelo de Rossi, 1684. Q. 598.2 O13u 1684

The text of Olina's work on bird-catching, first published in 1622, drew heavily on earlier work but was graced by an extensive suite of illustrations by Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630) and Francisco Villamena (1566-1624), showing many individual birds and, particularly, the means of hunting or snaring them. The work was reissued in 1684 with fine copper-engraved plates. Displayed (cover, and detail below) is an illustration depicting the hunting of partridge.



6. Brisson, Mathurin-Jacques, 1723-1806. *Ornithologie, ou, Méthode contenant la division des oiseaux en ordres, sections, genres, especes & leurs variétés*. 6 v. Paris: Cl. Jean-Baptiste Bauche, 1760. 598.2 B768o v.4



Brisson was until 1757 the curator of Réaumur's great natural history collection at the Académie des sciences. His six-volume *Ornithologie* (1760) described in French and Latin some 1500 birds, 500 of which were illustrated in the 220 plates by F. N. Martinet. Many of the species were foreign and presented to Europeans for the first time. The plate on display shows two varieties of Manakins, and the "Coq-de-Roche" (*Rupicola*)—all from South America.

7. Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de, 1707-1788. *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux*. 18 v. Paris: De l'imprimerie royale, [1770-1785]. 598.2 B86h 1770 v.13

Buffon was one of the most important and prolific writers on geology and natural history in the eighteenth century. His work on birds was the third part of his vast *Histoire naturelle*, which began to appear in 1749. The *Histoire...des oiseaux* appeared first in a larger-format quarto edition in nine volumes (1770-1783). A volume from the smaller duodecimo edition in eighteen volumes (1770-1785) is on display, showing the entry for the Kingfisher or Halcyon ("Martin-pêcheur, où l'alcyon.") Illustrations were by F. N. Martinet, who had worked on Brisson's *Ornithologie*.



8. Buffon, George Louis Leclerc, comte de, 1707-1788. *Planches enluminées des oiseaux de Buffon*. 4 v. [Paris, 1765-1780] 598.2 B86h1 v.1

Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton (1716-1800), Buffon's assistant curator at the Jardin du Roi, was involved from the beginning with providing descriptions for the *Histoire naturelle* and prepared volumes for publication after Buffon's death. He also oversaw the provision of a comprehensive set of illustrations, mostly to accompany Buffon's study of birds. 1008 hand-colored plates (973 depicting birds) were issued in batches over the course of fifteen years. Shown here (back cover) is the "Cardinal Dominiquain hupé, de la Louisiane."

9. Buffon, George Louis Leclerc, comte de, 1707-1788. *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux...*; rédigé par C.S. Sonnini. 28 v. Paris: F. Dufart, 1800?-1805. 598.2 B86h 1803 v.23

Buffon's *Histoire naturelle* was augmented by Charles Nicholas Sigisbert Sonnini de Mannoncourt (1751-1812). Sonnini had himself explored and collected specimens in Guyana and other parts of South America. Many new species of bird were described by Sonnini and illustrated by Jacques de Sève. On display is Plate ccxi, "Le rale d'eau" and "La marouette."





10. Catesby, Mark, 1633-1749. *Natural History of the Carolinas, Florida and the Bahama Islands*. 2 v. London, 1731. F. 570.795 C28n v.1

Mark Catesby made two extensive trips to the American and Caribbean colonies between 1712 and 1726, drawing and collecting specimens. Once back in England, he taught himself to engrave and produced one of the most beautiful natural history publications ever made. Only eighty complete copies of the first edition, colored by Catesby himself, are thought to exist. On display, is our familiar “Red bird” (*Coccothraustes ruber*), perched on a “hicory tree” branch.

11. Albin, Eleazar, fl. 1713-1759. *A Natural History of Birds*. 3 v. London: W. Innys and R. Manby, 1731-1738. 598.2 Al14n v.2

The first volume of Eleazar Albin's *A Natural History of Birds* appeared in 1731, the same year as Catesby's *Natural History of the Carolinas*. Albin produced perhaps the earliest comprehensive book on British birds with colored plates. Like Catesby, Albin personally hand-colored his plates, albeit with the help of his daughter, Elizabeth. On display is the Spoonbill (*Albardeola*).





12. Edwards, George, 1694-1773. *Gleanings of Natural History*. London: Printed for the author, 1758-1764. 4 v. Q. 598.2 Ed9n v.4

Edwards's *Gleanings of Natural History* (1758-1764) was a continuation of his earlier *A Natural History of Uncommon Birds ...* (London, 1743-1751), and contained 128 new engravings of birds and other animals. On display is what Edwards calls the "Black and blue Titmouse of Brazil," which he identifies with Brisson's "Tangara bleu de Cayenne."

13. Latham, John, 1740-1837. *General Synopsis of Birds*. 8 v. London, 1781-1801 (Supplement. London: Leigh & Sotheby, 1787-1801). Q. 598.2 L34g Sup. v.1

Latham's *General Synopsis of Birds* included 142 plates of birds, and presented many new species. The "Gigantic Crane" displayed here (see inside front cover) is depicted from the collection of Lady Mary Impey, who had drawings made in India from life. Latham also made use of a tail from the bird which he examined in the British Museum.

14. Wilson, Alexander, 1766-1813. *American Ornithology*. 9 v. Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1808-1814. Q.598.2 W69a 1808 v.1-3.

Alexander Wilson was Audubon's chief predecessor in the description and depiction of American birds. Opponents to Audubon—and there were many—rallied around Wilson's work as being the more scientifically inclined. Wilson's plates each depicted numerous birds, finely done but usually without much background. On display we see the "Rose breasted Grosbeak" (center) and five other birds.



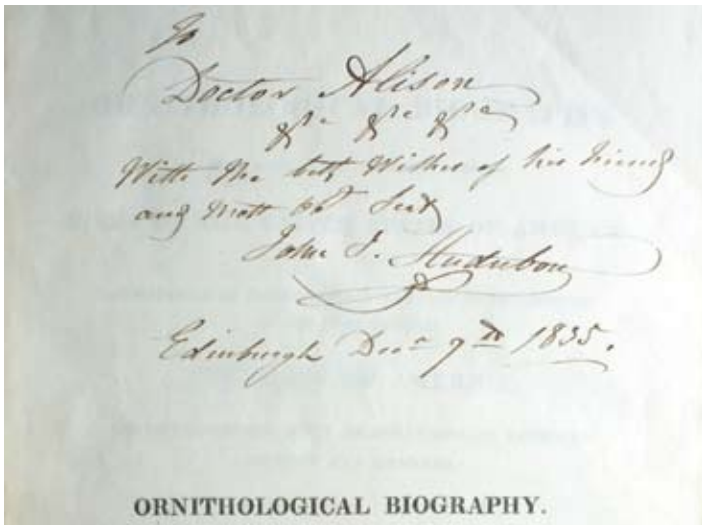


15. Bewick, Thomas, 1753-1828. *History of British Birds*. 2 v. Newcastle: Printed by Sol. Hodgson, for Beilby & Bewick: sold by them, and G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797-1804. 598.2 B468h v.1

Audubon's work could not be more different than the block-engraved vignettes produced by the great Thomas Bewick. Nonetheless, the two became quite close friends when Audubon went to England to promote and produce his immense project. Besides portraits of birds, Bewick provides numerous rustic and bucolic tailpieces of general interest and charm. On display is the Magpie.

16. Audubon, John James, 1785-1851. *Ornithological Biography*, vol. 3. Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1835. 598.2 Au2o

Audubon originally produced his *Birds of America* without text to avoid the necessity of depositing copyright copies in England. The text that goes with the work is entitled the *Ornithological Biography*, which Audubon wrote with the assistance of William Macgillivray. The five volumes were published separately over a period of eighteen years (1831-1849). The copy on display is the third volume (1835), inscribed by Audubon to one Dr. Alison of Edinburgh, where the first edition was published.



17. Audubon, John James, 1785-1851. *Birds of America*. NY:Audubon; Philadelphia: J. B. Chevalier, 1840. 598.2 Au2 1840 v.1

The first American edition of *Birds of America* was published in Philadelphia from 1840 [i.e. 1839] to 1844 in seven volumes. Like the Elephant Folio, the Royal Octavo edition—both get their names from the size of the paper used—was sold by subscription. It included 500 hand-colored lithographic plates, or sixty-five more illustrations than appeared in the folio edition. Many designs were also recomposed to ensure that there was only one species depicted on each plate. On display is the “Chuck-will’s Widow.”



Photographs and Design:
Dennis J. Sears

ISBN 978-0-9788134-3-7



dessiné & gravé par Martinot.

Cardinal Dominiquain hupé, de la Louisiane.