



National
Museums
Scotland

Audubon's Birds of America



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This touring exhibition is a unique opportunity to display a selection of National Museums Scotland's collection of prints from Audubon's remarkable masterpiece *The Birds of America*.

John James Audubon (1785–1851) was the most influential ornithological artist of the 19th century, revolutionising natural history art. His unique illustrations for *The Birds of America* make it one of the most famous and spectacular rare books in the world.

The Birds of America contains stunning hand-coloured and life-size prints of birds from North America, presented on double elephant folio paper. They were published over an 11 year period (1827–38) with the first ten plates engraved in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The exhibition will also include material connected to Audubon to tell the story of how *The Birds of America* project was realised, putting it into context with his predecessors and contemporaries. It will also consider the birds he studied and his influence on wildlife art and conservation.



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This exhibition will illustrate the following themes:

The scale of the artwork

Audubon insisted that the illustrations had to be life-size, so they were printed on double-elephant folio paper (approximately 38 x 26 inches).

Audubon's art

This theme will look at how Audubon depicted scenes from nature, his working practices and his influence on other bird illustrators.

Audubon and Scotland

Audubon worked with William Home Lizars to engrave and publish *The Birds of America*, and had many links with the scientific community in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The art of the engraver and colourist

The exhibition will compare an uncoloured version of a print next to its coloured version to demonstrate the printing process.



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The subscription

The Birds of America was published in fascicles of five prints. The huge scale of the undertaking – 435 illustrations in total – meant that Audubon had to rely on specimens to complete the work.

Taxonomy

Audubon identified 25 species new to science, but he also made errors in identification.

Conservation

The exhibition will highlight Audubon's awareness of changing habitats and the National Audubon Society's role in conservation.

What Audubon did next

Audubon's later publications include *Ornithological Biography* (with William MacGillivray), and *The viviparous quadrupeds of North America*.

Specifications

- Includes approximately 35 original double-elephant folio framed prints, as well as contextual letters, notebooks and articles
- Exhibition text and audio visual content are provided
- Available from early 2022
- Requires minimum of 200sqm (2000 sq ft) or 80 linear metres (260 ft)

1. *John James Audubon* by John Syme
© 2018 White House Historical Association
2. Carolina Parrot – Plate 26
3. Purple Grackle – Plate 7 (Detail)
4. Snowy Owl – Plate 121
5. Brown Lark – Plate 10
6. Great Footed Hawks – Plate 16 (Detail)



National Museums Scotland Scottish Charity, No. SC011130

For more information contact

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Above image: Purple Finch – Plate 4
Cover image: Carolina Pigeon or Turtle Dove – Plate 17

We create inspiring and memorable visitor experiences. Through our touring exhibitions we offer our internationally important collection and diverse research to a broader range of audiences, revealing the many fascinating stories these objects tell.

