

CUYAHOGA VALLEY TOWPATH TRAIL CENSUS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2022
(CVTTC)

HISTORY & FACTS of the DECEMBER CENSUS

DECEMBER	13-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
45 / 1,480	42 / 763	42 / 999	47 / 1,425	40 / 1,790	39 / 1,074	47 / 653	48 / 980	43 / 833
2019	2020	2021						
45 / 810	36 / 758	49 / 1,137						

Most Species seen in December : 49 on 12/03/2021.

Most Individual Birds seen in December : 1,790 Total Birds on 12/06/2014.

Fewest Species seen in December : 36* on 12/05/2020.

(* = 36 is the lowest species total ever on the census)

Fewest Individual Birds seen in December : 653 on 12/03/2016.

Species Average in December : 43.6 Species.

Total Individuals Average in December : 1,058.5 Total Birds.

Lowest Temperature on December Census : 19-degrees F on 12/04/2010.

Highest Temperature on December Census : 57-degrees F on 12/01/2012.

Longest Time Afield on December Census : 9:00 hours & 5 minutes on 12/03/2021.

Shortest Time Afield on December Census : 6 hours & 15 minutes on 12/04/2010.

LAST DECEMBER'S FIELD REPORT

12/03/21	TOTAL SPECIES:	49	START / END TIME:	7:40am - 4:45pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	1,137	TIME AFIELD:	9:05	FT. MI.:	13.51
ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
TEMP.:	38F ~ 39F	CONDITIONS:	Cloudy all day; very light on and off sprinkles from 10:10am - 12:00pm; light south breezes from 3:10pm until the end of the census.			
OBSERVERS:	John Henry (Red Lock Trailhead to Bolanz Rd.) and Douglas W. Vogus.					
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Fair - plenty of sloppy areas with some puddling.					
RIVER CONDITIONS:	Normal.					

EIGHT YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On December 06, 2014 we set a high for one of Ohio's most well-known and often persecuted and misunderstood birds, the American Crow. Our highest numbers come from winter hikes that last into the late afternoon as large flocks stream south through the Cuyahoga Valley as they all head to their communal overnight roosts. On these censuses it is best to bring a handheld clicker and tally them up as they pass. Not much else to do on the last leg of a cold winter census anyway!

DECEMBER 2022's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

DESCRIPTION: Largest crow in North America. Black from end of bill to tip of tail and claws; metallic violet gloss on body; blue-violet and green-blue gloss on wings evident when bird is in the hand, but appears entirely black whether close or far. Bill is larger than other American crow species, but distinctly smaller than either raven. Eyes of adult is brown, eyes of immature are blue.

LENGTH: 17" - 21" **WINGSPREAD:** 33" - 40" **WEIGHT:** Males: 15 & 1/2 oz. to 1 lb. 6 & 1/2 oz.
Females: 14 & 3/4 oz. to 1 lb. 5 & 1/2 oz.

VOICE: Most everyone is familiar with the "caw" of the American Crow. Chamberlin and Cornwell (1971) describe 23 calls of these crows and their meaning as well as mimicry. Juvenile's begging call is higher pitched, nasal, and resembles call of adult Fish Crow.

HABITS: No truer opportunist in the bird world, the diet of the American Crow is about as diverse as it gets: insects, spiders, millipedes, earthworms, frogs, salamanders, snakes, eggs, crustaceans (carries clams, mussels, etc. high in the air and drops to crack them open), fishes, garbage, road-killed animals, scavenges at parking lots for discarded food, corn and other grain crops, wild and cultivated fruit - basically anything edible is on the American Crow's menu. Often seen mobbing, with gang mentality, natural enemies like larger hawks and owls. Because of crow's fondness for corn (mostly waste in the fall) and other farm crops, occasional eating of eggs of songbirds and game birds, and often extravagant charges of damage against it, has been shot, poisoned, and roosts bombed by farmers and sportsmen, but still persists by wit and adaptability, and is economically useful for insect-eating and important ecologically.

HABITAT: Adaptable to both urban and rural environments; lives in open and wooded areas over almost entire United States and into southern Canada.

NESTING: **NEST:** Usually in woods, occasionally isolated trees; in crotch of tree usually 18 to 60 feet up; will nest on crossarms of utility poles in treeless prairies; well-built nest of branches and twigs, the nest bowl lined with bark, plant fibers, mosses, twine, rags, wool, roots and leaves. **EGGS:** February (in South) to June, 3 to 7 eggs, usually 4 to 6 eggs, blue-green to olive-green, blotched and spotted with browns and grays. **INCUBATION:** Possibly by both sexes, about 18 days; young first fly when 28 to 35 days old.

RANGE: Year-round resident in Ohio. **MIGRATION & DISPERSAL:** Diurnal migrant. In spring, arrive mid-February to late-April. Fall migration generally more protracted than in spring. Most depart north-central British Columbia and Alberta by late September; peak in Great Lakes early October to mid-November. Uncommon to rare migrant and winter visitor in deserts of the West. **WINTER:** Throughout much of the lower 48 states.

STATUS: Common to abundant. Expanded with clearing of forests and planting of woodlots in prairies. Many populations experienced dramatic declines with the spread of West Nile virus early this century. Nevertheless, long-term populations generally stable.

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the American Crow in Northeast Ohio.

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC	CCCCCCCC

- CCCCCCCC** = Common to Abundant. Frequently encountered in this region during this time of year.
- UUUUUUUU** = Uncommon. Occurs regularly during this time of year but not frequently detected.
- rrrrrrrrrr** = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- OOOOOOOO** = Occasional. Limited history in this region and are not to be expected.
- ******* = Accidental. Few records in the past 60 years. Not expected in this region during this time of year.
- ||||||||||||** = Fluctuating Abundance. May occur some years yet absent other years. Irruptive or overwintering birds.

History of the American Crow on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.	59	28	34	376	119	172	601	94
FEB.	30	42	78	42	31	108	36	152
MAR.	47	26	58	123	38	28	76	68
APR.	11	31	54	15	17	40	13	20
MAY	49	6	7	13	11	12	14	11
JUN.	4	7	7	10	8	8	5	7
JUL.	8	9	10	9	13	9	11	6
AUG.	9	11	11	9	12	70	10	7
SEP.	11	14	40	149	25	10	124	19
OCT.	122	53	24	17	84	17	221	61
NOV.	74	74	63	110	374	63	168	56
DEC.	54	62	41	159	958*	55	90	315

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
JAN.	59	32	16	46	489
FEB.	437	17	14	430	317
MAR.	46	16	23	23	70
APR.	12	7	36	8	68
MAY	13	7	7	13	14
JUN.	6	3	7	9	9
JUL.	5	7	8	9	8
AUG.	9	2	4	12	7
SEP.	51	128	18	8	14
OCT.	24	35	40	32	62
NOV.	104	118	40	397	22
DEC.	168	74	69	189	

DID YOU KNOW?:

Birds of a feather flock together - at least until nesting season! If you look at the sighting records of the American Crow over the course of the C.V.T.T.C. you'll see just how scarce and secretive these birds become when breeding season hits. From April to August their numbers plummet, as far as sightings per month. Not that the crows aren't present, they're just trying to raise their young under the radar, so to speak,

just as many other birds do. A far cry from their raucous ways during the rest of the year, especially come fall through winter, when roosts of crows have been observed at over 200,000 individuals!

- *** = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.
- BOLD #** = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.



Poisoned, persecuted and despised by many, the wily American Crow is highly adaptable and often taken for granted.

(photo by: Gary Henry)

DID YOU KNOW?:

Many of the artists I wrote about as the featured subjects for the 2022 "The Towpath Traveler" were the artists/ornithologists that I learned from my father. He was an amateur bird artist in his free time and a commercial artist by trade. Many of these artists were ones he studied as a child and a young man. His favorites were Louis Agassiz Fuertes, Major Allan Brooks, Walter A. Weber, George Miksch Sutton, Bob Kuhn and Ned Smith. Still other favorites were Winslow Homer, Andrew Wyeth, N.C. Wyeth and the "hunting art" of masters like Robert Abbett, David Maas, and Maynard Reece. The big cat and African wildlife subjects of Guy Coheleach and Simon Combes, the early western art of Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell as well as the newer western art by the likes of James Bama, Tom Lovell, Frank C. McCarthy, and Howard Terpning. And on to the "finer art" wildlife works of Robert Bateman, Carl Brenders, and Alan M. Hunt. There was no shortage of books about wildlife art in his collection and I absorbed it all.

But what's missing from this list of names? In a male-dominated field, we now look at some of the women in bird art. More modern names like Heather Bartmann and Julie Zickefoose are excellent artists often overlooked, but for the final artist write-up in 2002 we will look into five forgotten women from the early years of modern bird art and the reasons they didn't get the recognition they so deserved. The article is from my personal collection from the July-August 1980 issue of "International Wildlife" from David M. Lank.

Forgotten Women of wildlife art

In a man's world, they never received
the acclaim they deserved

BY DAVID M. LANK

Imaginative poses and decorative elements of Elizabeth Albin's art are typified by this parrot. In 1731, Albin and her father Eleazar produced the first book ever published with hand-colored plates of birds. Later editions deleted any reference to her.



ALBIN. Gould. Meyer. Audubon. To art historians, these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century luminaries rank among the greatest wildlife artists of all time, but some of the luster accorded to them belongs instead to their wives or daughters. For with possibly one exception, those ladies were accomplished artists in their own right. When they lived, though, men dominated the artistic world and received most of the plaudits. Consequently, the craftsmanship of these women went largely unrecognized and is often overlooked today. Still another notable female artist — Elizabeth Gwillim — remained undiscovered for 150 years, even though she was the first person ever to paint birds life-sized and in their proper ecological settings. Four of these forgotten women were British; one was American. Except for the American — Lucy Audubon, of whom a photograph in old age exists — we have no idea what they looked like. Their masterful depictions of birds remain their chief memorials.

Elizabeth Albin

*She was the better artist,
but her father
took all the credit*

Elizabeth Albin played a significant role in producing the first book ever published with hand-colored plates of birds, but history has accorded her father, Eleazar, all the credit. At first, he did make an attempt to share the glory with his daughter. On the title page of *A Natural History of Birds*, published in 1731, Albin identified the 306 copper plates as being "curiously engraved and carefully colored by his Daughter and Self." In the introduction, Albin wrote that the plates were "all done from Life, with all the Exactness I could either with my own Hand, or my

Daughters, whom I have taught to draw and paint after Life." The lack of an apostrophe in "Daughters" has led some to conclude that he referred to more than one, whereas in fact he was acknowledging the very important contribution of Elizabeth.

The elder Albin published several books and was listed as a "naturalist and teacher of water-color." Even his birthdate is uncertain, but it was probably in the late seventeenth century in England. About Elizabeth we know absolutely nothing, except that she was a remarkable artist. The words "Eliz. Albin Delin." appear on at least 44 of the plates. This was the conventional shorthand for "Elizabeth Albin Deliniavit," the Latin indicating that she drew the original. All her signed plates are found in the first volume. Strangely, almost all the plates in the other two volumes carry no identification at all, yet another half-dozen are surely by her.

Elizabeth's talents easily surpassed those of her father. Her work was more lifelike, the birds being placed in imaginative poses and surrounded by decorative — sometimes ecological — elements. A parrot eating cherries; a blue tit pecking amid beautiful flowers; a bullfinch standing over the graceful convoluted tendrils, leaves and blossoms of morning glories — only Elizabeth could have conceived of these layouts. The best that Eleazar could muster was a bittern wolfing down a protesting spread-eagle frog. The father quite simply was handicapped by insufficient talent.

The disparity between the talented daughter and the journeyman father perhaps turned the doting parent into a competitor. In later editions of the book, the title pages were changed, and all mention of Elizabeth was dropped. Soon the whole project was eclipsed as new ornithological knowledge was gathered. The inaccuracies and patent bunk in Albin's text condemned the book to lie undisturbed on library shelves for generations. But at the same time, guilt by association condemned Elizabeth's beautiful and accurate plates to the same obscurity. As recently as 1978, a lavish book on the history of wildlife art continued to ignore Elizabeth. It included an engraving of a pike, attributing it to Eleazar, despite the fact that it is clearly signed by the daughter. Elizabeth, regrettably, is not even mentioned in the text.

Elizabeth Gould

*A brilliant career ended
when she died
at age 37*

A century after Albin, society again shrouded the contribution of another great woman artist. But to put Elizabeth Gould in her proper context, one must first look at the work of her husband John Gould, a towering figure. During the mid-nineteenth century, he produced 43 volumes in England containing 3,159 hand-colored lithographs. Individually, many of the plates rank among the finest nature portraits of all time. Collectively, they represent one of the most ambitious wildlife publishing projects ever undertaken. For scope, elegance, consistency and over-

all excellence, nothing matches them.

And yet Gould himself scarcely ever completed a painting.

To Gould's factory came bird skins from all over the world. After laborious study and classification, he would map the layout and prepare preliminary sketches, which, for the product of a self-taught artist, were of remarkable quality. Then a succession of outstanding craftsmen took over to prepare the final detailed drawings, transfer them onto lithographic stones and hand-color them. Gould's artists included such greats as Edward Lear and Joseph Wolf, but the assistant he valued most was his wife Elizabeth.

Elizabeth Coxen married Gould in 1829. Soon after, her new husband received a shipment of Himalayan birds,



After sketching them, he decided to publish the results. "But who will do the plates on stone?" Elizabeth asked. "Why, *you*, of course!" replied her husband. This exchange, reported years later, led to Elizabeth's doing all 100 plates in their final form and transposing them onto sandstone blocks — the smooth "plates" for the hand-printing lithographic process — for Gould's first book, *A Century of Birds from the Himalayan Mountains*.

The results were stunning. For sheer artistry, she surpassed anything that had ever been done in England. But while Elizabeth worked brilliantly, it was John who was lionized.

A devoted husband, John Gould nev-

er hesitated to credit his wife. Between 1832 and 1837, he gave her unstinting praise for having done the majority of the plates in his *Birds of Europe*, three-quarters of the *Monograph of the Toucans* and all in the *Monograph of the Trogons*. She was also responsible for all the final drawings in *The Zoology of the Beagle* which introduced to the world the discoveries of Charles Darwin, and the "singular group of finches" that were to become the cornerstone of the theory of evolution.

Her brilliant career was to be cut short. In 1837, Gould started to publish his *Birds of Australia*, but it soon became evident that he needed more and better specimens. Accompanied by his

wife, he left England in 1838 for a two-year expedition which added more than 300 new species to the list of Australian avifauna. The thrill of success was short-lived. Within 11 months of their return, Elizabeth died at the young age of 37. Gould never totally recovered from the shock.

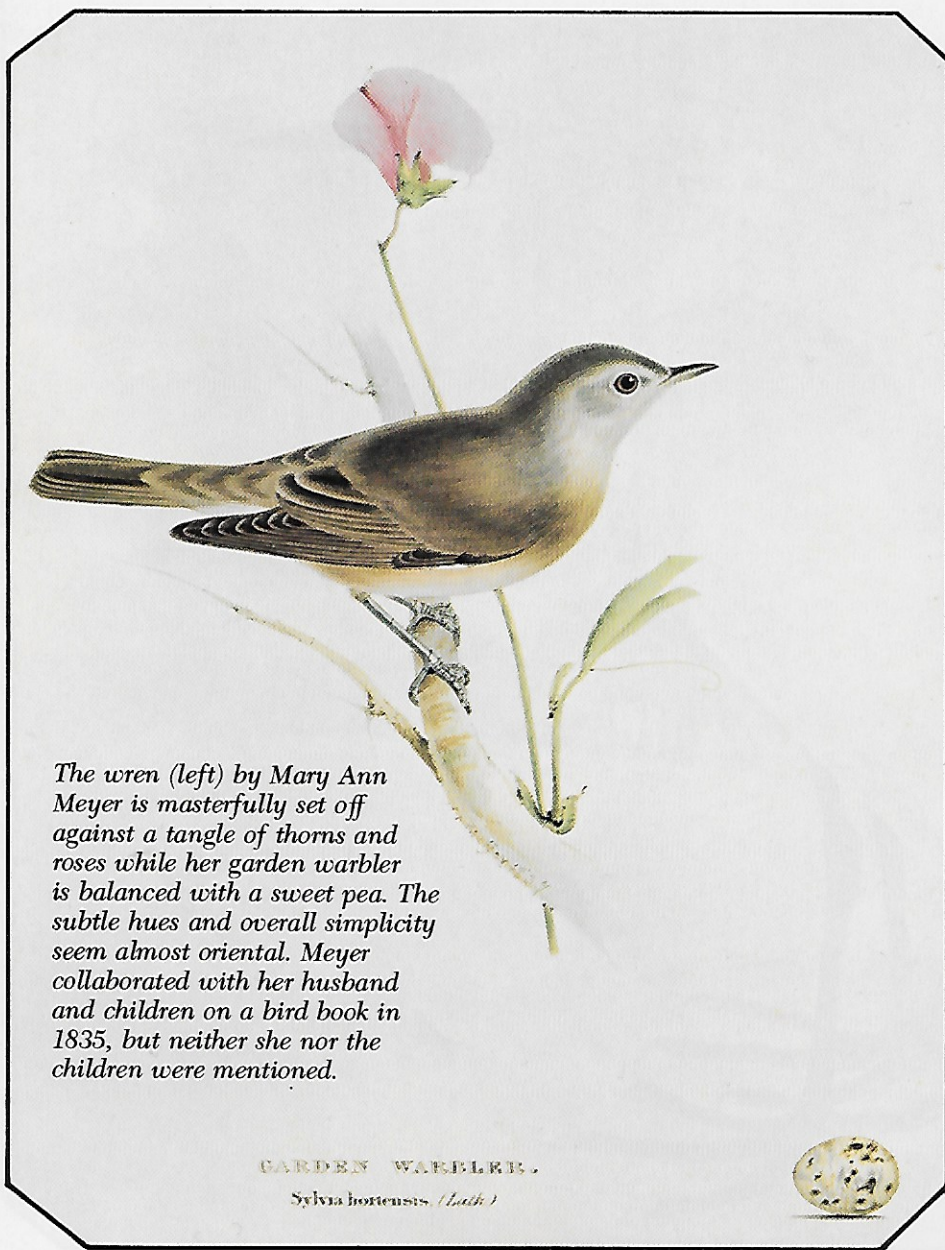
Mary Ann Meyer

*She collaborated on
four bird books
— all anonymously*

Roughly contemporary with the Goulds was another husband-and-wife team that collaborated, along with three sons and three daughters, on some of the most elegant bird books of all time. Henry Leonard Meyer and Mary Ann Moor married in 1830. An artist by profession, Henry spent countless hours studying the birds of the British Isles and soon determined to publish plates "to represent the Birds as much as possible in their natural attitudes." The result was four volumes of 313 hand-colored lithographs of the birds and their eggs, and a smaller seven-volume edition with 432 plates.

In the folios there is no text, and the undated (1835) title page states simply, "Illustrations of British Birds by H. L. Meyer." Unlike Albin or Gould, he made no mention of, nor gave any credit to, the essential contribution of his wife and children. But Mary Ann was responsible for many of the detailed sketches and for the transfer of all his and her own drawings onto the printing stones. In their finished state, the majority of the plates are marked "H. L. Meyer fec.," normally an indication that H. L. Meyer "fecit" or "did it." There are, however, two totally different styles. The large hawks, for instance, tend to be in stiff profile, whereas most of the smaller passerines have a softness and naturalness that is captivating. The poses, the composition and the treatment of the feathers create a "feeling" that is distinctly feminine. These, I am convinced, are the work of Mary Ann.

Unlike Audubon or Gould, the Meyers made no attempt to glorify through the use of overly elaborate settings, nor to dramatize through exaggerated poses. Now, after a century and a half of eclipse, the gentleness and sophistication of Mary Ann Meyer is finally becoming appreciated again.



The wren (left) by Mary Ann Meyer is masterfully set off against a tangle of thorns and roses while her garden warbler is balanced with a sweet pea. The subtle hues and overall simplicity seem almost oriental. Meyer collaborated with her husband and children on a bird book in 1835, but neither she nor the children were mentioned.

GARDEN WARBLER.

Sylvia hortensis. (Luth.)



Elizabeth Gwillim

*Had she published,
she might have eclipsed
John J. Audubon*

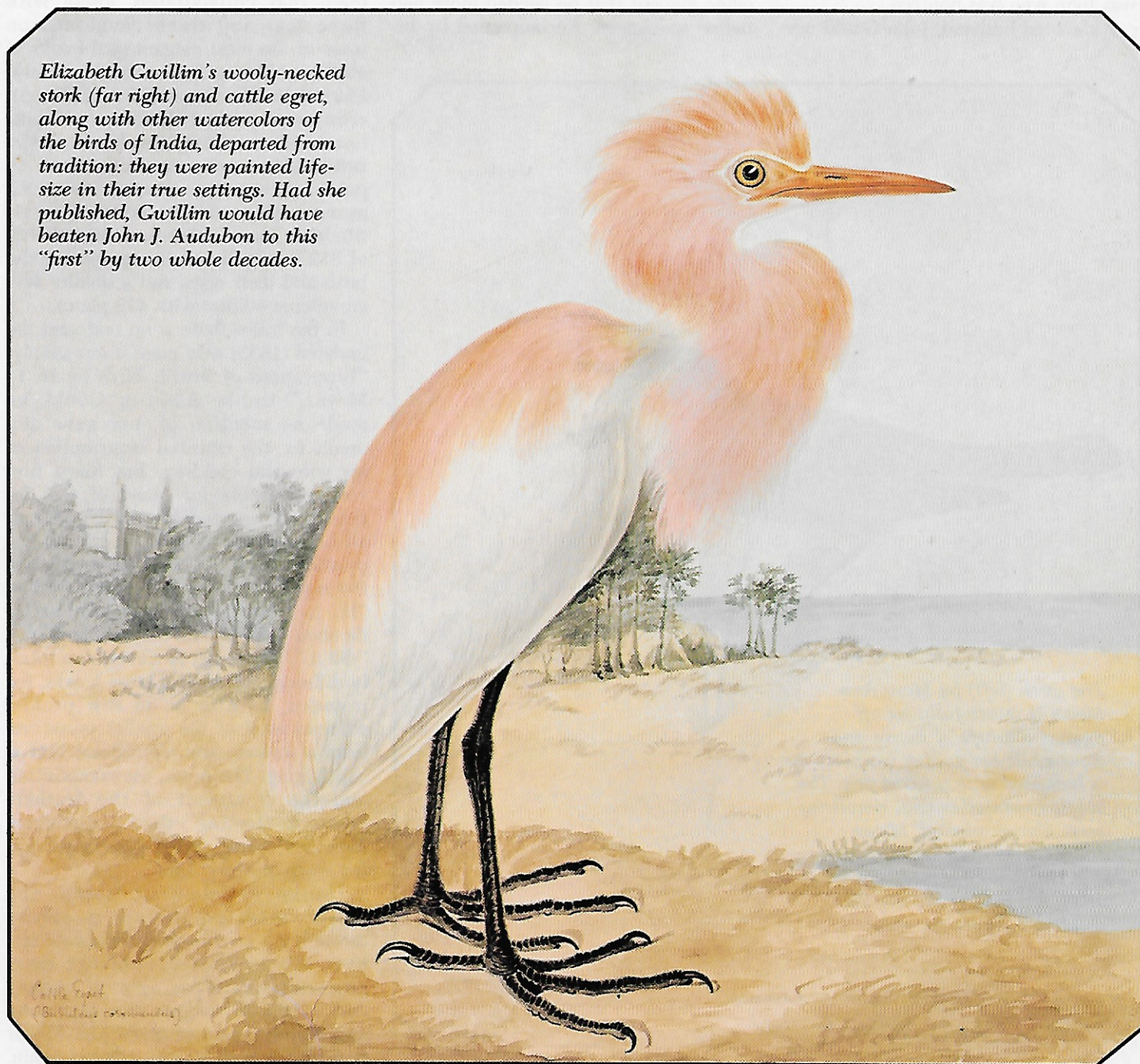
Had society not repressed women's artistic careers, the entire history of wildlife art might very well have been rewritten. One hundred and fifty years after the fact, we are only today discovering the staggering work of Elizabeth Gwillim, who in the fashion of good late-Georgian ladies, never published her work. Gwillim, the daughter of an accomplished English architect,

apparently lived from 1763 to 1807. She married a minor British official, Sir Henry Gwillim, and lived with him for several years in India. While there, she painted an unknown number of large watercolors of the birds of the country. They are astonishing, not only for their excellence, but also because they represent a total departure from traditional wildlife art forms. Even to the largest birds, the portraits were life-sized, and they were placed in very detailed and totally accurate ecological settings. Working from living or freshly killed birds, she was able to capture the exact

colors of the soft parts — the beak, the wattles and the feet. Many later paintings by other artists were of long-dead specimens whose soft parts had lost their original tones. Ornithologically, therefore, Gwillim paintings are far ahead of their time.

And they are two full decades ahead of John J. Audubon! Of course, Audubon never saw Gwillim's work, so he arrived at his style totally independently. Nevertheless, while Audubon was the first to *publish* life-sized birds in their proper ecological settings, Elizabeth Gwillim was the first to *paint* them.

Elizabeth Gwillim's woolly-necked stork (far right) and cattle egret, along with other watercolors of the birds of India, departed from tradition: they were painted life-size in their true settings. Had she published, Gwillim would have beaten John J. Audubon to this "first" by two whole decades.





*This portrait of a swamp sparrow in John J. Audubon's *The Birds of America* is especially notable for the foreshortening in the leaves and blossom of the mayapple. It is the only plate in the book attributed to Audubon's wife Lucy. Whether she really did draw it remains a mystery.*

Swamp Sparrow.

Had she published, her fame would have been universal.

Lucy Audubon

Was her budding "talent" just another of her husband's jokes?

There is a sense of romantic mystery surrounding almost everything about the American painter John James Audubon. His own account of his birth and early years was largely fictitious. He loved practical jokes, once introducing a visiting French naturalist to a black-and-white striped "squirrel." He could rise to great intellectual heights or sink to petty commercialism. For Audubon, the bizarre was routine. And something strange did occur in his book, *The Birds of America*. There are 435 plates, 434 of them "drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon." But one plate states categorically: "Drawn from Nature by Lucy Audubon."

Audubon engaged several remarkably talented artists, including his own sons, to supply floral, environmental or geographical backgrounds. Having his wife Lucy involved, therefore, would not in itself have been impossible. But there is little indication that she ever took art seriously. The plate in question shows a single swamp sparrow under the umbrella of a mayapple leaf and an open blossom. The simple profile of the bird calls for no great artistic talent, and Lucy may very well have been able to handle it. The minute detail of the feathers would have been added by the engravers on the final copper plate. But the leaves, especially the upper one, and the blossom required much more skill in foreshortening.

Did Lucy draw the entire plate, or even copy it from an earlier drawing of her husband dated 1812? Did she contribute one or more of the floral elements? Or did Audubon insert her name to flatter her, or to reassure her that her "rivals" (Audubon was a notorious ladies' man) were not a threat? For whatever reason, Audubon gave handwritten instructions on the original watercolor: "Mr. Havell will please have Lucy Audubon name on this plate instead of mine." ■

Bibliophile David M. Lank is an art collector, conservationist and wildlife art historian. He lives in Montreal.



A beautiful wren by Mary Ann Meyer. Just as beautiful are the rose's flowers, leaves and the tangle of thorns.

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