

# **'Audubon's Birds of America' – A new exhibition at the National Museum of Scotland**

A new exhibition will be opening at the National Museum of Scotland from 12 February which examines the artistry and legacy of one of the world's rarest, most coveted and biggest books.

'Audubon's Birds of America' will showcase 46 unbound prints from National Museums Scotland's collection, most of which have never been on display before, as well as a rare bound volume of the book, on loan from the Mitchell Library.



© J.L.Preece











This exhibition is a unique opportunity to see so much of Audubon's work in one place.

Published as a series between 1827 and 1838, *Birds of America* by John James Audubon (1785-1851) was a landmark work that achieved international renown due to the epic scale of the project and the book's spectacular, life-sized ornithological illustrations. His paintings of the natural world are still some of the most famous in the history of art and natural sciences.





© J.L.Preece



© J.L.Preece





The exhibition, which is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery, will also explore Audubon's links with the scientific and artistic community in late-Enlightenment

Edinburgh, where the process of publishing the book began.

He visited Edinburgh six times, including research visits to what is now the National Museum of Scotland. The exhibition will bring the story up to the present day, looking at the conservation status of some of the species featured in Birds of America.



## AUDUBON'S BIRDS OF AMERICA

*Birds of America* by John James Audubon is a landmark work of ornithological illustration. Based on illustrations between 1827 and 1838, the 435 engraved, hand-colored prints of North American birds based on Audubon's observations are celebrated for their beauty, accuracy and rich detail. Complete sets were bound in four volumes. Today, only 132 complete sets are known to exist, making *Birds of America* one of the rarest and most valuable books in the world.

The National Museum's Scotland collection includes an incomplete set of prints from a subscription that lapsed, as well as prints that were sold off individually by their owners. The majority have never been on display until now.

© J.L.Preece



## FASCINATION FOR NATURE

Audubon was developing his art at a time of burgeoning interest in the natural world, both for scientific study and as a rich inspiration for writers and artists. The late 18th and early 19th centuries also saw the growth of private and public natural history collections. Extravagant displays of specimens in museums fueled a growing public fascination with nature and many artists used taxidermy as source material.

Audubon claimed never to have drawn from a stuffed specimen and demanded contemporaries who did to label "naturalists." He promoted himself as an artist who drew from life—representing the beauty and beauty of nature observed at first hand, in the wild.



© J.L.Preece





'Audubon's Birds of America'

12 February to 8 May 2022

National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh

*Free entry for Members*