

JAMES TRUDEAU AND THE RECENT DISCOVERY OF A COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS OF EGGS OF NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS

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Though it has generally escaped the notice of the several commentators who have reviewed the paintings of John James Audubon, very few of his drawings include representations of birds' eggs. There is a scattering of plates among his *Birds of America* where the eggs comprise accessories to the bird portrait but nowhere does Audubon focus our attention on a nest with eggs as the center of interest. Herrick (1917, 1:374 and 2:387) records the intention of Audubon to illustrate "the eggs of most of the species," but that with the many new birds discovered in the West when the great work was drawing to its close there was a necessity for abandoning the figures of the eggs, which Audubon had planned for the final fascicles, to permit the inclusion of these late additions from the travels of Townsend and Nuttall. Can it be that this illustrated account of eggs was to have been carried out in cooperation with his New Orleans friend, James de Berty Trudeau (1817-1887), "physician, surgeon, artillery officer, painter, and sculptor"?¹

In the course of reorganization of the collections of the Louisiana State Museum, Mr. Clive Hardy, Archivist and historical consultant, recently brought to light an overlooked parcel of 80 water color drawings of unknown provenance but named, and some longer holographs in several different hands. Through the cooperation of the Museum's Manager, Mr. C. E. Frampton, and at the suggestion of Mr. Hardy, I have examined these materials and offer the present explanation of their nature.

The first group of drawings of birds' eggs with full dates associated with them were noticed by Mr. Hardy to carry the inscription "Labrador. 4. 6. July 1833." Thinking that these drawings might relate to Audubon's Labrador trip, Mr. Hardy checked the dates in the Labrador Journal and found indeed that this was so. However, I believe that these egg paintings are not

the work of Audubon, but of his friend Trudeau who drew them from collections Audubon brought back from Labrador. Four egg drawings are associated as part of this Labrador origin, and must be directly due to Audubon's interest. These four are: "Sylvia striata" [Blackpoll Warbler], "Anthus spicolata" [Horned Lark], "Fringilla savanna" [Savannah Sparrow], and "Fringilla leucophyrus" [White-crowned Sparrow]. A drawing of an egg of undoubted Labrador source is labelled "Clangula barrovii" [Barrow's Goldeneye]. Another labelled "Phalacrocorax dylophus. June. Labrador" represents the egg of the double-crested cormorant. Certainly these may be traced to Audubon's expedition of 1833. The egg drawing of "Little Auk," now known as Dovekie, and well known from Labrador coast, is not dated, but the birds were not drawn until 1836 (Plate 339, *Birds of America*), and so the egg collection may have a later and different origin.

Watermarks have been of limited use in identification. Whether the scaup duck egg dates from the 1833 Labrador trip is unrecorded; in any event Audubon's label "Marila" is inscribed on Whatman Turkey Mill paper watermarked 1837. Another drawing, Audubon's "Red-necked Grebe" [i.e. Holboell's grebe, Plate 298], inscribed "Grebe rubricollis" is drawn on Whatman paper watermarked 1838. It may be noted that these dates suggest Trudeau's active period when he was in correspondence with Audubon, Bachman, and other naturalists.

Beside these materials of Labrador origin and surely dating from Audubon's trip of 1833, there is a group of egg paintings without doubt originating with Trudeau. One is labelled "Common Buzzard. Grand Saline, May, 1840," accompanied by two paragraphs of notes in a thin delicate hand. These paragraphs, evidently written in the field, read:

"The common Buzzard is the most common hawk in the plains of this district of

¹ See Postscriptum.

Missouri. This Bird is not positively as shy as its congeners. Its note differs from the European buzzard as well as the nest and eggs. Those 3 in number were roundish (in 5 nests I found) of a dirty white without any dots nor blotches. All the nests I have seen were on high isolated trees; never on the ground. (June 20th 1840).

"This egg I figure here was taken by me in a nest placed in a cotton tree (platanus) 2 miles from the Grand Saline. They were all perfectly alike. The mother was watching the boy climbing up the tree, at little distance but out of the reach of my gun. As he arrived close to the nest she made a swoop at him which afforded me a chance of bringing her on the ground, and thereby ascertain positively to what species the eggs belonged. (June 27th)."

Trudeau's field note on the burrowing owl, reproduced here, (Fig. 1) reads:

"[The Burrowing Owl is very abundant in all the Prairie dogs or marmots villages.] It has been stated that these birds inhabited in desert villages and in ancient holes de-

serted by the marmots: the fact may be true but in all the deserted villages which abound in the Prairies of the S. W. Missouri I have never seen a bird. On contrary they are common in all villages w[h]ere the marmots are to be found. Do they inhabit the same holes? Why should the birds follow the quadrupeds if they were on unfriendly terms? The fact is this: the Bird occupies in the burrow a kind of vestibulum about 2 or 3 feet from the entrance. Its eggs 2 in number are laid there in some cases on the ground, in others on a few dry sticks. This burrow is so deep that with our poor means we were not enabled to find its termination. But often I have seen the owl and the marmot enter the same Burrow (perhaps frightened by my approach). Hiding myself, I could see with a spy glass, the Bird emerging out first, then the marmot would be seen cautiously taking a peep, and being certain that no enemy is present run out and bark to call the others. This seems to me to be in favour of the opinion of those

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Figure 1. Trudeau's field notes on the Burrowing Owl.

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The handwriting has been identified as that of Dr. Trudeau who accompanied Charles Tixier on a trip to the Osage country in 1840 (McDermott, 1940, map opp. p. 272). A letter from Trudeau, dated New York, Jan. 17, 1846, to Audubon's friend and patron, Edward Harris (Harris Papers, Alabama State Archives, Montgomery) confirms this. The letter does not mention Trudeau's egg painting activities.

James Trudeau's son, Edward Livingston Trudeau, M.D., says in his *Autobiography* (1916, p. 9) that a sister-in-law, Miss Félicie Bringier, wrote him that his father "often helped Audubon with the anatomy of his ornithology work, and drew illustrations of birds and eggs for him." It was this statement, perhaps more than other leads, that suggested the provenance of these paintings as Trudeau's. We know that Dr. James Trudeau returned to New Orleans in 1858 after practicing medicine in New York city for many years. At about this time he sold his library, but he must have retained a few favorite books and acquired others of a natural history character later because several of his books appeared in 1956 at the annual book fair sponsored by the New Orleans Symphony Society, and these are now in my library. My recollection of Trudeau's inscription on the title page of the second volume of C. D. Degland's *Ornithologie Européenne* (Paris, 1849) established the association of this little collection of egg drawings with Audubon's friend. This second volume of Degland's account of European birds would have had peculiar interest for Trudeau since it described the terns. Audubon named Trudeau's Tern (*Sterna trudeaui* Aud.) in 1838 and it is illustrated in his *Birds of America* as Plate 409.

Dr. Trudeau also owned a copy of L. F. Alfred Maury, *La Terre et l'Homme* (Paris, 1857) and the sixth edition of Micheler's *l'Oiseau* (Paris, 1859) a popular work on birds of that period. When the present drawings came to the State Museum is not known; Dr. Trudeau died in New Orleans on May 25, 1887.

The collection of birds' egg drawings in-

clude other memoranda than those identified as either Audubon's or Trudeau's, but these cannot now be placed with certainty. A drawing of the egg of the Red-shouldered Hawk is signed "L. Marchisio 1839" and some drawings carry numbers, e.g., "88 Tetrao cupido" [Prairie Chicken], "89 Tetrao obscura" [Dusky Grouse], and others, the highest number noted being 102. The significance of these numbers has not been determined. The earliest dated drawing is of the egg of the Orchard Oriole, June 20, 1821. However, this date may represent the collection date of the egg, and not the year the drawing was executed. Audubon was at the Pirrie Plantation, "Oakley," five miles from St. Francisville, on June 20, 1821, having arrived on the 18th as tutor to Miss Eliza Pirrie, accompanied by his assistant John Mason. Audubon's drawing of the Orchard Oriole, Plate 42 in his *Birds of America*, is dated 1828, and includes an empty nest!

Examination of documents and published accounts of Trudeau has revealed contradictions and some egregious errors, and so to summarize our information on "one of the most learned, accomplished and many sided men that Louisiana ever produced" I offer the following chronology:

1817

Sept. 14. Born, second child, eldest son of M. and Mme. Rene Trudeau, at the family sugar plantation in Jefferson Parish.

ca. 1827

Sent to College of Louis-le-Grand, Paris. Because of failing health transferred to a military school in Switzerland to complete his primary education.

before 1835

Returned to Paris for medical education.

ca. 1836

Enrolled as medical student at University of Pennsylvania under Dr. Joseph Pancoast.

1837

March. Received M.D. degree. Subject of thesis: apoplexy.

June 27. Read a paper before the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, on a presumed new species of woodpecker (*Picus auduboni* [proved to be a form of *P. villosus*, hairy woodpecker]). This paper was later published in the Academy's *Journal* 7: 404-

406. 1837. Sometime during the year moved to New York City and there entered medical practice.

Sometime during 1837-38 visited Great Egg Harbor, N.J., and collected the skin of *Sterna trudeaui* described by Audubon.

1838

Oct. 7. Resident at No. 12 Rue de Lancy, Paris, whence came Rev. John Bachman and his companion Christopher Happoldt, the three then proceeding to the residence of the Prince of Messina to examine his natural history cabinet.

Audubon published Trudeau's Tern (*Sterna trudeaui*) as Plate 409 in *Birds of America*.

Dec. 19. Audubon wrote to Edward Harris that Trudeau had been "commissioned" to buy books for him in Paris, but he had received "neither books nor promise of them from Trudeau as yet." He mentions Trudeau's having examined the bird skins of J. K. Townsend, presumably in Philadelphia, and of Frederick Ward.

1839

June 4. Read a paper before the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, on a presumed new species of tanager (*Pyrrhuloxia leucoptera*). This paper was later published in the *Academy's Journal* 8: 160. 1839.

1840

May. Left New Orleans in company of Victor Tixier on the *Grand Pratte* for St. Louis.

May 12. Reached St. Louis. Left for Osage country on 15th.

May 20. Left Independence, Missouri, for Nion-Chou [Neosho River].

June 20. Collected eggs of "Common Buzzard" [Swainson Hawk] and others at Grand Saline, Osage country, which were later painted.

Osage tribe presented Dr. Trudeau with Indian costume in which John Woodhouse Audubon later painted him.

Aug. 25. Arrived in St. Louis en route to New Orleans, as Tixier left for New York via Pittsburgh.

1841

Jan. or Feb. John Woodhouse Audubon painted Trudeau in Osage costume.

1843

Removed to New York City and reestablished his medical practice there.

Married Céphise Berger (b. 1825) of New York.

June 19. John G. Bell, member of Audubon's trip up the Missouri River, took nest and eggs of Lark Bunting. Edward Harris, also a member of the expedition, wrote in his journal of this date: "we hope [they] will be an acquisition for our friend, Dr. Trudeau."

1844

Aug. 4. Wrote to Edward Harris, Morristown, N.J., relative to sales offer of European bird skins.

1845

Feb. S. F. Baird, then a resident of Carlisle, Pa., visited Trudeau in New York city and saw a "splendid collection of birds' eggs and drawings of eggs."

1846

Jan. 17. Wrote to Edward Harris, Morristown, N. J., relative to medical experiments he had been carrying out with carotid artery of sheep.

1847

A Founder of New York Academy of Medicine, established this year.

1847-48

Active as artist and sculptor, particularly of medical colleagues.

1848

Oct. 5. Edward Livingston Trudeau (d. 1915) born, the youngest of three children.

1851

Divorced Céphise Berger Trudeau.

1852

March 8. Trudeau's "entire professional library . . . also a fine assortment of medical instruments" sold at auction.

[1857

See Postscriptum.]

1858 (?)

Removed to New Orleans.

1860

Commissioned Brigadier-General of artillery in Confederate Army.

1861

Published *Considérations sur la Défense de l'état la Louisiane, et sur l'organisation de ses milices* (New Orleans, 1861), 82 pp. Copy in Howard Tilton Memorial Library. Severely wounded at Battle of Shiloh.

1863

Married Louise Bringier and settled at

plantation La Maison Blanche, St. James Parish, on the Mississippi River.

1864

Oct. Taken prisoner.

1882-84

Chief Editor of *Medical Review according to the Dosimetric Method of Dr. Ad. Burggraeve*, published in New Orleans, extending through vols. 1-3.

1887

May 25. Died in New Orleans.

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Postscriptum

Thomas Mayo Brewer, 1814-1880, M.D., "America's first oölogist," close personal friend of Audubon and of Spencer Fullerton Baird while the latter was living at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, as well as later when Baird was associated with the Smithsonian Institution, published *North American Oölogy* (Washington, 1857, reissued in 1859). In his preface Brewer substantiates our prophecy that a work on North American birds' eggs was planned. However, instead of Audubon and Trudeau as co-authors, we learn it was to have been Brewer and Trudeau. Though Brewer does not admit as much, it is within the realm of possibility that this project was spurred by Audubon's having to abandon his inclusion of the drawings of birds' eggs in his *Birds of America*, as announced in his Prospectus, and noted above. That Brewer was deeply indebted to Audubon there can be no doubt, and his characterization is outstanding in a

welter of critiques of the American woodsman. Here is Brewer's tribute:

"To John James Audubon, the gifted artist, the ardent and enthusiastic devotee alike of art and nature, the warm-hearted and kindly impulsive man, we must give credit for having been the first to warm into a permanent and enduring aim the earlier germs of interest in this subject. It is to his prompt and opportune sympathy, his generous contributions of materials and of many valuable specimens which would be irreplaceable if lost, that he is indebted for the foundation of his present knowledge, and many of the materials for his task."

Brewer then remarks that where he has found it necessary to correct errors—

"It is hardly possible even for the exact and cautious to avoid falling into mistakes,"—

but that he speaks of them "without imputation of censure."

Then Brewer continues with an explanation of the Trudeau material in hand:

"To Dr. James Trudeau, hardly less than to Mr. Audubon, acknowledgments must be made for valuable co-operation and assistance. Many years since, almost coincident with his earliest investigations, the design was entertained of a joint work illustrative of American Oölogy. It has been abandoned in consequence of the continued absence of Dr. Trudeau from the country, the want of knowledge of his present address, and, above all, the fact that no use could be made of the materials jointly collected for the illustrations. To Dr. Trudeau the writer is indebted for a large number of valuable and rare specimens, and for a much larger number of drawings, which are often referred to in the text, but which cannot be made use of in illustrating the present work."

It only remains to report that the high cost of the color plates forced Brewer's project to be discontinued after the appearance of Part One. The Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, received Brewer's oölogical collection by his will and details relative to this present series of paintings should be sought there.