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# JOHN GOULD

HIS BIRDS  
& BEASTS



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# JOHN GOULD: HIS BIRDS & BEASTS

JOHN GOULD, one of the most important and productive ornithological illustrators of the 19th century, was born in Lyme, Dorset, in 1804. He began to study birds and to learn taxidermy while assisting his father, a gardener, in the royal gardens of Windsor. By 1827, he was employed by the Zoological Society in the care of their ornithological collections, and in 1829 published the first of his nearly 300 scientific articles. In the same year he married Elizabeth Coxen, an accomplished artist and lithographer who became his partner in the production of a long series of major natural history monographs distinguished for their fine color plates. This partnership lasted until her death in 1841 following the birth of their sixth child. Together, John and Elizabeth Gould published seven major works, with 697 ornithological color plates. The celebrated artist and humorist, Edward Lear, assisted the Goulds during the production of two of these works and about 150 of the plates are his; the rest are the work of the Goulds.

After Mrs. Gould's death, John Gould depended upon H. C. Richter, W. Hart, and (to a lesser degree) Joseph Wolf to support him in his work. Over the next forty years, Gould and his artists published volume after enormous volume of color plates—on kangaroos and other Australian mammals, but above all on birds—the birds of Australia, Asia, Great Britain and New Guinea, toucans, partridges, trogons, pittas, and Gould's beloved humming-birds. He and his works were welcomed into the most prestigious scientific circles and into the libraries and homes of the world. England's Audubon, as he was sometimes called, was responsible for the publication of over 3,300 color plates of birds and other animals. An efficient businessman, he made a financial success of an activity notorious for its commercial failure. Severe in manner and apparently never knowing his employees' Christian names, he yet left his artists substantial bequests and was willing, in his old age with his life's work not yet completed, to spend the time and effort to encourage young naturalists. He died in 1881, leaving a priceless legacy of beauty and scientific knowledge. He chose his own epitaph: John Gould the Bird Man.

Gould had always been his own publisher, financing his ventures largely from the advance subscriptions for his works. At the time of his death, his stock of unsold copies, unbound text and plates in various states, lithographic stones, drawings and paintings, amounted to nearly three tons. The entire lot, along

with Gould's copyright, was purchased by the London bookseller, Henry Sotheran Ltd, and put in storage where it rested undisturbed for over 50 years. In 1936, Ralph Ellis went to London and when he left in December 1937 a great part of the John Gould archives came to America with him.

## The Ellis Collection

Ralph Nicholson Ellis, jr., the most generous donor of books in the history of the University of Kansas, was born in 1908 to a wealthy Long Island couple. Following his socialite parents on the annual round of their various country estates (Long Island, South Carolina, Maine), he developed an early interest in natural history, particularly in birds and mammals. He began collecting books on natural history in 1926 and this became his consuming passion after the disastrous failure of his health during an Australian natural history expedition in 1931. By the end of his short life in 1945, he had put together a library of over 55,000 items of ornithology, mammalogy, voyages and travels, and bibliography. This he bequeathed to the University of Kansas in gratitude for the encouragement given him in his youth by E. Raymond Hall whom he had known at Berkeley and who had become Director of the KU Museum of Natural History.

Perhaps the greatest collecting period of Ellis' life was his twenty-month London stay in 1936-37 when he spent around \$63,000 on prizes for his library. Chief among these was the greater part of the Sotheran Gould stock—he tried to capture the entire lot but even his wealth could not manage this. What he did bring home now stands on the shelves of the Spencer Library where it is the world's major source for the study of Gould's illustrative techniques and the complex relationships among the members of his atelier.

## The Published Works

John Gould's major works (all published in London by Gould unless otherwise indicated):

1831. *A Century of Birds from the Himalaya Mountains*. The Ellis Collection has a copy of the plates in original wrappers dated 1831, a bound copy dated 1831, a bound copy dated 1832, and unbound sheets of text dated 1832.

1832-37. *The Birds of Europe*. 5 volumes, originally issued in 22 parts from 1832 to 1837. The Ellis



Collection has a bound copy dated 1837 and a second bound copy composed of uncolored pulls of the plates on India paper which is reputed to be Gould's own "reserved copy."

1834. *A Monograph of the Ramphastidae or Family of Toucans.*

1835-38. *A Monograph of the Trogonidae or Family of Trogons.* The Ellis copy is in the three original parts with printed boards dated 1835, 1835, and 1838.

1837-38. *A Synopsis of the Birds of Australia, and the Adjacent Islands.* The Ellis Collection has a copy in the original four parts, dated January 1837, April 1837, April 1838 and April 1838, as well as a bound copy.

1837-38. *The Birds of Australia, and the Adjacent Islands.* The only two parts published of a work cancelled when Gould decided to go to Australia. The Ellis copy is in original printed boards with Part I dated August 1837 and Part II February 1838.

1837-38. *Icones Avium, or Figures and Descriptions of New and Interesting Species of Birds from Various Parts of the Globe.* The Ellis Collection has the two parts in original printed boards dated August 1837 and August 1838.

1840-48. *The Birds of Australia. In Seven Volumes.* Originally published in 36 parts from 1 December 1840 to 1 December 1848. The Ellis copy is bound and dated 1848.

1841-47. *J. Gould's Monographie der Ramphastiden*, Nürnberg. Gould's own copy of the original four parts of his *A Monograph of the Ramphastidae*, translated by J. H. C. Sturm.

1841. *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle . . . Part III. Birds*, by John Gould, London: Smith, Elder and Co.

1841-42. *A Monograph of the Macropodidae, or Family of Kangaroos.* The two parts in original printed boards (Part I dated August 1st, 1841, and Part II May 1st, 1842) and a bound copy.

1843-44. *The Zoology of the Voyage of H.M.S. Sulphur*, London: Smith, Elder and Co. Parts 3 (October 1843) and 4 (January 1844), *Birds*, by John Gould. In original parts. The Ellis Collection has the same plates also in a volume labelled "Atlas of Plates of Sulphur."

1844-50. *A Monograph of the Odontophorinae, or Partridges of America.* Originally published in 3 parts: 1844, 1846, 1850. The Ellis copy is bound and dated 1850.

1845-60. *The Mammals of Australia.* The twelve parts in original printed boards, dated from May 1st, 1845 to November 1st, 1860, and a bound copy in three volumes dated 1863.

1848. *An Introduction to the Birds of Australia.* The introductory matter to *The Birds of Australia*, set up in small type and published in octavo in a limited number, probably issued on August 1, 1848.

1849-61. *A Monograph of the Trochilidae, or Family of Humming-Birds.* Originally issued in 25 parts, dated February 1849-September 1861. The Ellis copy is the final seven-volume form, dated 1850-1883.

1850-83. *The Birds of Asia.* Originally published in 35 parts, 1 January 1850-August 1883. The Ellis copy is the final seven-volume form, dated 1850-1883.

1851-69. *The Birds of Australia. Supplement.* Originally published in five parts, 15 March 1851-1 August 1869. The Ellis copy is the final form, in one volume, dated 1869.

1854. *A Monograph of the Ramphastidae, or Family of Toucans.* A new edition, with revised text and new plates.

1855. *Supplement to the First Edition of A Monograph of the Ramphastidae.* Separate publication of the new species first published in the preceding entry.

1858-75. *A Monograph of the Trogonidae, or Family of Trogons.* A new edition with new plates and rewritten text, originally published in four parts, 1858-September 1875. The Ellis copy is the final form, in one volume, dated 1875.

1861. *An Introduction to the Trochilidae, or Family of Humming-Birds.* The introductory matter to the *Monograph of the Trochilidae*, printed in small type and format in limited numbers. One of the Ellis copies has corrections in Gould's hand which appear to have been adopted for the final version of the introductory matter.

1863. *An Introduction to the Mammals of Australia.* A production similar to that in the previous entry. Published by September 18th, 1863, when Gould presented one of the Ellis copies to the London Institution.

1862-73. *The Birds of Great Britain.* Originally published in 25 parts, from 1 October 1862 to December 1873. The Ellis copy is the final form, in five volumes, dated 1873.

1865. *Handbook to the Birds of Australia.* Two volumes, published 1 September and 2 December 1865.

1873. *An Introduction to the Birds of Great Britain.* Another separate publication of introductory matter. Although the preface is dated 1 December 1873, Gould presented the Ellis copy to the Marchioness of Westminster on 26 November 1873.

1875-88. *The Birds of New Guinea and the Adjacent Papuan Islands.* Originally published in 25 parts, the first 11 by Gould and the remainder completed after his death by R. Bowdler Sharpe. The



Ellis copy is the final form published in five volumes by Henry Sotheran & Co., and, like the parts, dated 1875-1888.

1880-81. *Monograph of the Pittidae*. Two parts, of which the second (consisting of text only) is probably an unauthorized posthumous publication.

1880-87. *A Monograph of the Trochilidae, or Family of Humming-Birds. Supplement*. Published in five parts, the first two (1880 and 1881) by Gould and the remaining three (1883, 1885, 1887) by R. Bowdler Sharpe. The Ellis copy is the final form published as a single volume by Henry Sotheran & Co., dated 1887.

## Other material in the Gould Collection

In addition to the material listed above, the Collection includes a number of separately published prospectuses and announcements for various Gould works, a few letters, and some of Gould's scientific articles. The chief glory of the Gould holdings is known as the "Gould drawings." These take many forms and amount to over 2,000 rough sketches, heavily annotated drawings, water-colors (both rough and highly finished), tissue drawings and tracings, and twelve lithographic stones. Over 1,000 of the drawings have been identified with their published versions; many are certainly unpublished.

One of the problems posed by John Gould's publications is that of his own contribution to the illustrations. Gould was not a trained artist; he was trained as a gardener and a taxidermist, yet he certainly had an artist's eye. He had a number of trained artists working for him. His own contribution has been described on the one hand as little more than managerial and on the other as that of the native genius whose quick pencil inspired and enlivened the more technically perfect work of the others. Those closest to him in time have suggested that he made the original rough sketches which were then perfected and transferred to stone and color by others under his constant direction. The "Gould drawings" make it clear that the production of a finished lithograph went through many stages and that changes were made in response to directions from Gould. Without a good deal of further study, however, it is not possible to say exactly what these stages were or who performed which operation. What, for example, is the function of the tracings? At least one pair is labelled "Tracing 1" and "Tracing 2" and neither appears to be a "litho transfer," *i.e.*, the medium through which the image was transferred from paper to the lithographic stone. Some of the questions may be answered by study of

the "Gould drawings." Many of them are annotated, some heavily. Some are signed. Over 150 separate figures appear in at least two versions preliminary to the final lithograph, some in as many as five.

In putting together this small exhibit, just forty-four pieces out of well over two thousand, an attempt has been made to show the increasing excellence of the Gould work over fifty years of publishing, the beauty and variety of the animals he brought into the homes of his readers, and the work of his different artists. Above all, however, the purpose has been to show the types of evidence available in the collection for the study and possible solution of the problem of how these works and, by extension, others of the period were actually produced.

## The Exhibit

*Case 1.* The humming-birds were especially close to Gould's heart. He himself owned a remarkable collection of these jewel-like creatures which he displayed in a pavilion in the London Zoological Gardens during the Great Exhibition of 1851. The technical problems of representing the iridescent colors of the plumage in his illustrations exercised his ingenuity until he developed a process of metallic reproduction which provides a remarkable glowing realism in his pictures.

1. Three tissue tracings, by Gould or Richter, showing humming-birds and *Cicoma alba*, the White Stork. The two sorts of birds appear to have been drawn originally on a single piece of tissue and then traced separately onto the other two pieces, each of which shows color experimentation.
2. Pencil drawing by John Gould of his humming-bird pavilion, with the cases he designed and built for exhibiting the birds.
3. Wood-engraved portrait of Gould and two views (interior and exterior) of his humming-bird pavilion, shown in the *Illustrated London News*, 12 June 1852, p. 457.
4. Finished hand-colored lithographic print of the Cometes phaon, *Gould*, a humming-bird first described by John Gould. In his *A Monograph of the Trochilidae*, vol. 3, plate 175.
5. A set of three experimental prints by Gould incorporating five humming-birds from various illustrations. Cometes phaon, *Gould*, for example, is taken from the plate shown as item 4 in this case. These tissue prints have been used as color experiments, the colored parts back-painted on the other side of the tissue with silver (a) and gold (b), or left unpainted (c).



*Case 2.* The unique mammals of Australia fascinated Gould. His intent in making an expedition to Australia had been to observe and describe the largely unknown bird life. He discovered on his arrival in 1838 that the mammals were equally in need of description and for the next two years he and his assistants worked intensively on both birds and mammals. In this case are shown a few examples of his work with those attractive animals, the kangaroos.

1. Pencil portrait, probably by H. C. Richter, of *Osphranter antilopus*, the Red Wallaroo, heavily annotated with instructions by Gould.
2. The finished hand-colored lithograph of *O. antilopus*, showing the changes indicated by Gould's instructions. In *The Mammals of Australia*, vol. 2, plate 8.
3. Rough sketch, probably by Gould, of a group of *Osphranter rufus*, the Great Red Kangaroo. The inclusion of the figure of a man in a short night-shirt and a state of high distress may be for the purposes of scale but the animated response of one kangaroo to this apparition shows that humor was not entirely lacking from the expedition.
4. Water-color, probably by Richter, of the same group of *O. rufus* (minus night-shirted man), with notes by Gould.
5. Water-color portrait of *O. rufus*, probably by Richter, with notes by Gould.

*Case 3.* The extraordinary bower bird is one of the most fascinating of the birds which Gould observed during his Australian expedition of 1838 to 1840. The "bowers" which it builds as assembly places for courtship dances were for some years believed to be structures built by Australian aborigines as cradles or playpens for their children.

1. Painting by John Gould of the Spotted Bower Bird. Gift of Gordon C. Sauer. This double-page painting may have been used for transfer to the lithographic stone. Many of its lines are cut through the paper as if by an etching needle, one of the methods known to have been used in 19th century lithography for transfer of the image from drawing to stone. Surprisingly enough, the actual methods used by practitioners of this art are no longer clearly known. The great number of different stages of the process in the Spencer collection of Gould offers a significant opportunity to the researcher for rediscovery of the details of the process.
2. Hand-colored lithographic print of the same bird. In *The Birds of Australia*, vol. 4, plate 8.

3. Tracing on tissue of a single-page version of the same plate, unpublished. The various elements of the picture have been traced, moved closer together, and certain relationships altered.

4. Painting by W. Hart of another bower bird, *Chlamydodera occipitalis*.

*Case 4.* *Pitta concinna*, Gould, is one of the many birds first described by John Gould. It is also one of the animals for which the Ellis Collection has a nearly complete set of the many stages through which a picture passed on its way from original sketch to published hand-colored lithograph.

1. Rough water-color sketch, probably by Gould.
2. Ink and water color, by W. Hart, with pencilled changes possibly by Gould.
3. Tracing, incorporating suggested changes.
4. Lithographic print (before text), with pencilled instructions possibly by Gould.
5. Lithographic print after text, uncolored.
6. Final, hand-colored lithographic print. In *The Birds of New Guinea*, vol. 4, plate 31.

Other stages of the process, including a lithographic stone, for a similar bird are shown in Case 6.

*Case 5.* The artist who did more work for Gould than any of the other associated artists except Elizabeth Gould was H. C. Richter.

1. Richter's drawing of the Duck-Billed Platypus, demonstrating his success at handling mammalian and avian characteristics in one animal.
2. The finished hand-colored lithographic print. In *The Mammals of Australia*, vol. 1, plate 1.

*Case 6.* Three stages in the production of an illustration.

1. Tracing from an original drawing of *Pitta cocinea*, *Eyton*.
2. Lithographic stone for finished print.
3. Final hand-colored lithographic print by J. Gould and W. Hart. In *The Birds of Asia*, vol. 5, plate 68.

*Case 7.*

The eye can be easily fooled  
When viewing the products of Gould.  
The hand, it is clear,  
May be John, Liz or Lear,  
Or others whose talents were pooled.

—L. E. James Helyar

The close coöperation in which Gould and his artists worked makes it very difficult to determine which piece of work is from whose hand. Since the sketches are rarely signed, stylistic evidence and



identification of the occasional fragment of handwriting become important, although Gould's handwriting may be found on the work of any of the group.

1. Small study of bill colors of *Ramphastus toco*, with short note. This may be by Elizabeth Gould.
- 2 and 3. Tissue tracings of a large drawing of *Ramphastus toco*. Possibly by Edward Lear.
4. Water-color sketch of *pteroglossus prasinus*, heavily annotated. Both sketch and notes almost certainly by Edward Lear.
5. Water-color sketch of *Pteroglossus regalis*, heavily annotated. Both sketch and notes almost certainly by Edward Lear.
6. Finished hand-colored lithographic print of *Ramphastus toco*. Signed by Edward Lear. The bird's wicked and humorous eye would probably identify it as the work of that celebrated nonsense writer and accomplished artist even without his signature. The closeness of size and pose of the bird to that in 2 and 3 above—the difference is in the turn of the head—makes it likely that the tracings are for an unused version of the same original. In *A Monograph of the Ramphastidae* (1834, plate 6), acquired on the tenth anniversary of the Spencer Library (1979) with the generous help of the Friends of the Library.

Case 8. Elizabeth Coxen Gould (1804-1841) was an accomplished artist and lithographer when she and John Gould were married in 1829. She was the chief artist and lithographer for the Gould partnership for the first ten years of major publications. The first major monograph of John and Elizabeth Gould was *A Century of Birds from the Himalaya Mountains* (1831 and 1832, 80 plates). Through the succeeding years they produced *The Birds of Europe* (1832-37, 449 plates, a quarter of them by Edward Lear), *A Monograph of the Ramphastidae* (1834, 34 plates, some of them by Edward Lear), *A Monograph of the Trogonidae* (1835-38, 36 plates), *A Synopsis of the Birds of Australia* (1837-38, 73 plates), *The Birds of Australia* (1837-38, 20 plates), and *Icones Avium* (1837-38, 18 plates).

In May 1838, the Goulds sailed for Australia where they spent two years of intensive work. Gould explored as far as four hundred miles into the interior of the continent and two of his assistants lost their lives on the expedition. Mrs. Gould spent at least part of the time at Government House in Hobart, Tasmania, and it was there that Franklin Gould (the youngest of the three Gould sons) was born. She painted a good many birds on the journey as we know from signed and dated drawings in the Collection. Unfortunately she did not long survive (dying in

1841) and her work was translated into lithographs by H. C. Richter and published under his name.

1. *Noctua cuculoides*, 1830-31. A fine example of Elizabeth Gould's early style, stiff and somewhat primitive but charming. Published in *A Century of Birds*, plate 4.
2. An unidentified bird, 1830-31 from the style.
3. *Garrulus lanceolatus*, 1830-31. Published in *A Century of Birds*, plate 40.
- 4a. Yellow-Tailed Thornbill, 1838-40. Published in *The Birds of Australia* (1848), vol. 3, plate 63.
- 4b. Merops or Bee Eater, probably 1838-40. Unpublished.
5. Short-Tailed Petrel, late August 1838. Painted off the coast of Argentina on the voyage out to Australia. The bird also occurs off southern Australia and was published in *The Birds of Australia* (1848), vol. 7, plate 56. An excellent example of Elizabeth Gould's mature style, easy and relaxed with very careful detail.
6. Great Grey Petrel, 25 August 1838. Painted at a location close to that of entry 5. Published in *The Birds of Australia* (1848), vol. 7, plate 47.
7. Diving Petrel, 1838? Published in *The Birds of Australia* (1848), vol. 7, plate 60.

Items 4a through 7 are the gifts of Gordon C. Sauer.

8. Unidentified sketch of a woman, found among sketches for birds published in *The Birds of Europe* (1832-37). This is not the work of Elizabeth Gould but it is pleasant to imagine that this may be a likeness of Elizabeth by John.

In addition to commemorating John Gould, who died one hundred years ago, the exhibit is intended to celebrate the publication of *John Gould the Bird Man: a Chronology and Bibliography*, a new major work by Gordon C. Sauer. Dr. Sauer, a long-time friend of the University Libraries and the donor of a particularly important group of Gould drawings to the Collection, began to develop his interest in John Gould almost forty years ago. From the purchase of a few Gould prints from an antique dealer, he progressed to a volume of one of the great monographs, and then to original drawings, notably by Elizabeth Gould and Edward Lear. Dr. Sauer's book is to be published later this year by the Lansdowne Press of Australia and will be distributed in the United States by the Regents Press of Kansas.

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