John James Audubon: Bird Artist and Adventurer

John James Audubon is famous for his beautiful paintings of birds. Audubon had many ups and downs in his life and even spent a short time in jail. But he worked hard and eventually became a famous painter. In his paintings, people saw beautiful birds that they had never seen before. At that time, photographs didn’t even exist! The Audubon Society, an organization that protects birds, was named after him.

Audubon was born in 1785 in Saint Domingue, now called Haiti, on the same island as the Dominican Republic. The son of a French sea captain, Audubon spent most of his childhood in France. When he was 12, his father sent him away to military school to become a navy sailor. But Audubon got seasick easily and failed his navy exams. He didn’t want to be a sailor like his father. He was happy to return home and study art and nature. When he turned 18, Audubon came to America to escape war in Europe. At his family’s home near Philadelphia, Audubon learned English, hunted, drew, and studied birds. He studied Eastern phoebes, a kind of flycatcher, a small bird that eats flying insects. He is the first person who did a “bird-banding” experiment in North America. He tied thin threads to the phoebes’ legs and discovered that the same birds returned to nest at his home, year after year.

Audubon became a businessman and moved to the wild western frontier with his wife, Lucy. But he wasn’t very good at business: He lost all of his money and spent time in jail. With no job, Audubon decided to do what he did best: paint birds! His wife Lucy earned money as a teacher so that Audubon could travel down the Mississippi River and paint. He lived from the land, hunted with Native Americans, and once met the adventurer Daniel Boone. Audubon worked hard and his painting slowly improved. He lost many of his paintings when they were all eaten by rats (!), but he kept working. When American bookmakers rejected his paintings, Audubon traveled to Europe, where people loved his artwork. Eventually his paintings became famous both in Europe and the United States. He is most famous for *The Birds of America*, a large book of over 400 paintings of North American birds.

John James Audubon died in 1851. In 1886, a man named George Bird Grinnell created the Audubon Society to protect birds. Audubon’s wife Lucy had taught Grinnell when he was a little boy, and so Grinnell named his new society in Audubon’s honor. The Audubon Society still works today to protect the birds that Audubon loved and painted all of his life.

Look it up! To learn more about John James Audubon, visit www.audubon.org/john-james-audubon
Bird artist John James Audubon spent his life out in the woods and fields, learning about birds. He also slowly improved his drawing and painting over many years. How? He practiced. He drew a lot! You can learn to draw birds, too. All you need is:

- sheets of white paper
- a pencil, pen, markers, or crayons.
- photographs of birds to help you practice
- Take a paper pad and pencil to a nearby park or wherever you can see birds.

1. One way to get started drawing a bird is to make it with simple shapes.

2. You can change the sizes of the different shapes to make different birds. You can make a sparrow of an egret! Just change the size and position of the shapes.

3. You can use this system to draw and paint all kinds of birds. Study photos or live birds as you draw!

And yes, even pigeons are beautiful birds that are fun to draw!
To draw birds well, it also helps to understand how they are built. A bird has the shape it does partly because of its skeleton. Human beings have a skeleton, too, and you can see in the pictures to the right that we have a lot of the same bones. But the bones are in different positions. What we think of as a bird’s foot is actually its toes… and what we think of as its leg is actually its foot!

Can you match up the parts of the birds’ legs below with the parts of the human leg?
Go with a Grown-Up to See...

Richard Rivera’s Eagles of New York

Did you know that there are eagles all over New York City? There are... but maybe not the kind you think. While you can see real live eagles here at home (check www.nycaudubon.org for trips in the fall and winter!), the easiest way to see them is in sculptures and statues. Photographer Richard Rivera has taken a series of beautiful photos, Eagles of New York. You can visit www.eaglesofnewyork.com to see them all. Then, go with a grown-up to find all the eagles hidden right here in your city! How many can you find and photograph yourself? We’ll start you off with just a few:

Grant’s Tomb
You can get up close to this eagle, which guards the tomb of Ulysses S. Grant, Commander of the Union Army in the American Civil War and 18th president of the US. The General Grant National Memorial, designed by John H. Duncan, can be found at 123rd Street and Riverside Drive in Manhattan.

Grand Army Plaza
The victorious eagle by Frederick W. MacMonnies, perched on the Grand Army Plaza arch in Brooklyn, is a memorial to the soldiers and sailors who fought in the American Civil War.

Penn Station
The two granite eagles by A. A. Weinman at Penn Station and Seventh Avenue in Manhattan are a reminder of the beauty of the original Pennsylvania Station, demolished in 1963.

Rockefeller Center
This colorful sculpture shows the goddess Athena, patron of the arts, with Pegasus and an eagle at 1 Rockefeller Plaza at 49th Street, in Manhattan.

Central Park
This exciting sculpture of eagles on the hunt was created by Christophe Fratin. You can find it in Central Park just west of the Naumburg Bandshell and south of Terrace Drive near 72nd Street.

Visit www.eaglesofnewyork.com to find out where more eagles “live” in New York City. Then, let us know what you find and email us your photos at lookaround@nycaudubon.org. Go with a grown-up and have fun!