

# *Continuum of Greatness*

*The Hall of Fame for Great Americans  
at Bronx Community College , CUNY*



*John James Audubon*

*1785-1851*

*“A true conservationist is a man who knows  
that the world is not given by his fathers, but  
borrowed from his children. ”*

## **Hall of Fame Facts**

### **John James Audubon (1785--1851)**

- Elected into Hall of Fame: 1900
- Edison was among the first group of great Americans to be inducted into the Hall of Fame
- Edison received 67 out of 97 votes.
- Sculpture by: Stirling Calder, 1927.

# John James Audubon

## April 26 , 1785— January 27, 1851



**J**ohn James Audubon was born in Haiti, as the illegitimate son of a French Sea Captain and his French mistress. He was taken to France when he was very young to be raised by his warm and affectionate stepmother who encouraged young Audubon's interest in art and nature.

In the year 1803, when he was 18, his father sent him to the US to escape a draft into Napoleon's army and to learn commerce in the US. He lived in Mill Grove, Pennsylvania where he pursued his passion for bird watching and drawing. In 1804, Audubon's curiosity about birds that left before the winter was to be satisfied by a bird banding attempt. He tied a silver string around the legs of each of the little birds nesting in his neighborhood. The bird in question was the Eastern Phoebe, which left a week after the banding. In the following spring, Audubon was ecstatic to see that his banded bird had returned to its original nesting site! This was a huge finding in the early nineteenth century when very little was guessed about bird migration.

In order to make drawings of birds, Audubon had to shoot them and prop them up in different positions, the way most bird drawings were made in those days. He was also eager to draw birds as he saw them alive, which reflected in his drawings. During his time in Pennsylvania, Audubon spent many hours with Lucy Bakewell, who seemed to take an interest in his curious pastime of watching birds in a cave.

Four years later, the two were married and moved to Louisville, KY. A year later, the couple had their first child, and moved to Henderson, KY where Audubon set up a dry goods business. The couple had two more boys and a girl who died in infancy, which was followed by the birth of another girl who also died. Even though the business did well for a while, Audubon lost all money and was even held in a debtor's prison briefly in 1819. Throughout this time of personal and financial loss, Audubon continued to travel for bird watching and drawing, thereby managing to amass an elaborate portfolio. Lucy, was an understanding and independent wife who urged him to continue working on his portfolio and present his to likely publishers. Therefore, with practically no prospects and very little money, in 1826, Audubon sailed to England in search of a publisher that would take a chance on his *Birds of North America*, which contained life-sized drawings of birds. Fortunately, his trip was a success and his very large book, often referred to as the *double elephant folio* would be published in four volumes by 1838. He also began to work on the *Ornithological Biographies* with William MacGillivray, the Scottish ornithologist.

1803  
↓  
John James Audubon successfully conducts the First bird banding experiment in North America



1827-38  
↓  
John James Audubon publishes *Birds of America* with more than 1000 life size paintings of birds.

1831-38  
↓  
Audubon works with William MacGillivray to publish *Ornithological Biographies* – life histories of each of the species in the work.



1883  
↓  
American Ornithologists Union (AOU) is founded

1892  
↓  
The demand for bird's feathers to make plumed hats reaches epidemic proportions. In the US, waterfowl, such as the Great Egret is at the brink of extinction as a result of plume hunting.

1899  
↓  
The Audubon Society is set up to protect birds from plume hunting.

Audubon's work has been described as being somewhat theatric with the birds in interesting poses. Audubon's flair for drama also had more practical reasons – to show the identifying characters of the bird to advantage. His depictions are also replete with all the correct details that make up the bird's ecological milieu thereby underscoring the storytelling aspect of his personal style.

In 1840, Audubon began to work on *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*. The family had moved to upper Manhattan in 1836 where Audubon remained until his death in 1851. He is buried in the Trinity Cemetery, not far from where he lived.



In 1899, a group of concerned Americans came together to protect birds from hunting. One of them was George Bird Grinnell, a former student of Lucy Audubon. He decided to name the group the Audubon Society, which grew into the National Audubon Society.

Consulted Sources:

**Davies, Jacqueline and M. Sweet.** *The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon*, Houghton Mifflin, 2007  
**Hart-Davis, Duff.** *Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of The Birds of America*, Holt Paperbacks, 2005



John James Audubon State Park in Henderson, KY also houses the world's largest collection of Audubon's art. It is one of the many monuments that remain in the memory of this great American artist, naturalist, and lover of birds.

**Rhodes, Richard.** *John James Audubon: The Making of an American*, Vintage, 2006

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<p>1901 ↓ An Audubon Model Law passed to protect water birds from plume hunting.</p> <p>1934 ↓ Roger Tory Peterson publishes his <i>Field Guide for Birds</i>.</p>	<p>1935 ↓ Konrad Lorenz publishes his findings on Imprinting Behavior in Ducks and Geese.</p> <p>1953 ↓ Niko Tinbergen publishes <i>The Herring Gull's World</i>, a book on bird behavior.</p>	<p>1961 ↓ Rachel Carson publishes <i>Silent Spring</i></p> <p>1990 ↓ Charles Sibley and Jon Ahlquist publish <i>Phylogeny and Classification of Birds: A Study in Molecular Evolution</i></p>	<p>1994 ↓ The Bald Eagle makes a comeback.</p> <p>1999 ↓ Almost 50,000 participants take part in the 100th Audubon Christmas Bird Count, now the longest-running bird survey in the world.</p>

## Named after John James Audubon:

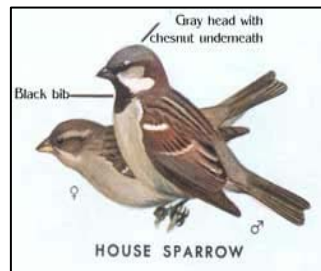
National Audubon Society  
Audubon Zoo, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Audubon Studios, New Orleans, Louisiana  
Audubon Gallery, Charleston, South Carolina  
Audubon House Gallery of Natural History, Key West, FL  
John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, PA  
John James Audubon State Park, Henderson, KY  
Audubon Gallery, American Museum of Natural History, NY  
Audubon Hospital, Louisville, KY  
Audubon Parkway, Louisville, KY  
John James Audubon Museum and Nature Center, Athens, OH  
Audubon Avenue in Manhattan, NY  
Audubon Park, NY  
City of Audubon, IA  
Audubon County, IA  
John James Audubon Cultural Center, Audubon, IA  
Audubon, PA  
Audubon Terrace Museum Group, NY  
Audubon's Christmas Bird Count  
Audubon field guides  
Audubon's Shearwater  
Audubon's Warbler  
Audubon's Oriole

## Following in the Tradition of John James Audubon:

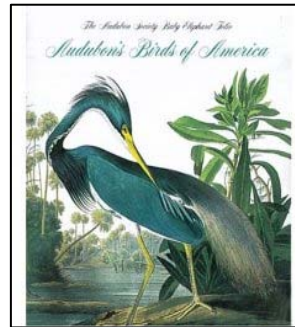
Roger Tory Peterson:

Roger Tory Peterson was born in 1908, in Jamestown, NY. He was introduced to birding by his seventh grade teacher who encouraged him to join the **Audubon Club**. Peterson became a keen birder and his artistic talents allowed him to pursue a career in producing excellent illustrations of birds and other wildlife.

He is credited with the invention of the modern field guide. His illustrations were unique in that they were a lot more schematic with arrows pointing to useful signs needed for quick identification of birds whether at rest or in flight. Today Peterson field guides are extremely popular with the advanced student of nature as well as the beginner.



As a tribute to John James Audubon, he published *Audubon's Birds of America*, a much more portable edition containing faithful reproductions of all 428 full color engravings made by Audubon. The updated version also contains a narrative for each bird correcting many of the problems contained in the original version.



## Useful Audubon Websites:

- For information on the history and conservation efforts of the National Audubon Society:  
<http://www.audubon.org>
- For a virtual tour of Audubon's paintings of birds:  
<http://emuseum.nyhistory.org/code/emuseum.asp>

## Useful Audubon Websites:

- For visitor information on Audubon state park and Audubon Nature Center and Museum:  
<http://parks.ky.gov/findparks/recparks/au/>