



Blackburnian Warbler, plate 135 from "The Birds of America"

Date

published 1832

Primary Maker

John James Audubon

Medium

Engraving and aquatint with hand-coloring

Description

John James Audubon was a self-taught artist, ornithologist, and naturalist whose best-known work is his four-volume publication *The Birds of America* (1827–1839). At the age of thirty-five, Audubon set out to paint every bird in North America and then worked to have his images reproduced as life-size prints. Prior to the invention of photography, this was the most efficient and accurate way to depict wildlife. The Blackburnian Warbler is the 135th bird that was made as part of Audubon's series of 435 prints. In an accompanying text, Audubon describes the Blackburnian Warbler as a “charming and delicate” bird, and notes that he saw the creature “in all the brilliancy of its spring plumage, and had the pleasure of hearing its sweet song” while on a trip to the Magdalen Islands in June of 1833. He also notes that the specimen used as a model for his painting was found near Reading, Pennsylvania, along the Schuylkill River. While Audubon is renowned for his work as an ornithologist and his name has become synonymous with American birding, it is vital to

acknowledge that he owned enslaved people and was an outspoken anti-abolitionist. Furthermore, like many fellow naturalists of the time, Audubon would sometimes raid Indigenous gravesites for skulls and other “anthropological materials.” This complex and dishonorable past is unequivocally part of Audubon's legacy and his work as an ornithologist, underlined by the fact that he often utilized the help of uncredited Black and Indigenous people on his research ventures.

Dimensions

Plate: 19 9/16 × 12 5/16 in. (49.7 × 31.3 cm) Sheet: 31 5/16 × 22 3/16 in. (79.5 × 56.4 cm) Support: 37 1/2 × 25 1/4 in. (95.3 × 64.1 cm)