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Oiseaux de papier : la Collection Taylor White à McGill

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Article abstract

After he retired from his career as an ophthalmologist in 1920, Dr Casey Wood devoted himself to his two private passions – ornithology and book collecting. He attended auctions, badgered book dealers, and haunted bookshops wherever he travelled with his wife Emma Shearer Wood. In 1926 Wood turned to Wheldon and Wesley and their agent, William John Henry Craddock (1870-1941), to help him acquire a magnificent collection held by the bookseller Quaritch of over 900 large, colourful and often life-size drawings of exotic birds, animals and fish, and equally imposing images of flowers, insects, and fungi, loosely inserted in twenty-nine portfolios, and painted by arguably the finest animal and botanical painters of eighteenth-century Britain. The collection had been created by the British jurist and collector Taylor White FRS (1701-72). This article recounts how White accumulated his collection, and how Wood acquired it for the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection at McGill University Library in Montreal. It also describes how White catalogued his collection, and how subsequent dealers and librarians added their own layers of documentation, up to the digitization of the paintings and manuscript notes by the McGill Library, which has made them available to contemporary researchers.

Paper Birds: The Taylor White Collection

Victoria Dickenson, McGill University

Abstract

After he retired from his career as an ophthalmologist in 1920, Dr Casey Wood devoted himself to his two private passions—ornithology and book collecting. He attended auctions, badgered book dealers, and haunted bookshops wherever he travelled with his wife Emma Shearer Wood. In 1926 Wood turned to Wheldon and Wesley and their agent, William John Henry Craddock (1870–1941), to help him acquire a magnificent collection held by the bookseller Quaritch of over 900 large, colourful and often life-size drawings of exotic birds, animals and fish, and equally imposing images of flowers, insects, and fungi, loosely inserted in twenty-nine portfolios, and painted by arguably the finest animal and botanical painters of eighteenth-century Britain. The collection had been created by the British jurist and collector Taylor White FRS (1701–72). This article recounts how White accumulated his collection, and how Wood acquired it for the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection at McGill University Library in Montreal. It also describes how White catalogued his collection, and how subsequent dealers and librarians added their own layers of documentation, up to the digitization of the paintings and manuscript notes by the McGill Library, which has made them available to contemporary researchers.

Résumé

Après sa retraite de sa carrière d'ophtalmologiste en 1920, le Dr Casey Wood s'est consacré à ses deux passions privées — l'ornithologie et la collection de livres. Il a assisté à des enchères, harcelé des commerçants de livres, et hanté des librairies partout où il voyageait avec son épouse Emma Shearer Wood. En 1926, Wood s'est tourné vers Wheldon and Westley et leur agent, William John Henry Craddock (1870–1941), pour demander leur aide dans l'acquisition d'une magnifique collection

détenue par le commerçant de livres Quaritch de plus de 900 dessins de grande taille, colorés et souvent de grandeur réelle, d'oiseaux exotiques, d'animaux et de poissons, ainsi que des images également imposantes de fleurs, d'insectes et de champignons. Cette collection a été créée à l'origine par le juriste et collectionneur Taylor White, MSR (1701–72). Les nombreuses œuvres, exécutées par sans doute les meilleurs peintres animaliers et botaniques de la Grande-Bretagne du dix-huitième siècle, avaient été insérées librement dans vingt-neuf porte-documents. Dans cet article, nous retraçons l'accumulation de la collection par White, ainsi que son acquisition par Wood pour la Collection d'histoire naturelle Blacker Wood de la Bibliothèque universitaire de McGill à Montréal. Nous décrivons également comment White a catalogué sa collection, l'ajout de niveaux supplémentaires de documentation par les commerçants et bibliothécaires subséquents, et, finalement, la numérisation des peintures et des notes manuscrites par la Bibliothèque de McGill, projet qui a rendu ces œuvres accessibles aux chercheurs·euses contemporain·e·s.

Introduction

June 1926, Casey Wood (1856–1942) attended a sale of "Valuable Printed Books, Illuminated Manuscripts and Miniatures, Autograph Letters and Historical Documents" at Sotheby's in London. According to the handwritten notes on the British Library's copy of the sale catalogue, Wood bought only a few small items, but on the third day, an important lot caught his eye. Lot 657A was described as "A Magnificent Collection of Fourteen Hundred and Sixty-Two Original Water-Colour Drawings of Natural History Subjects."

> FOLIO.
>
> ORIGINAL WATER-COLOUR DRAWINGS.
>
> 657A A MAGNIFICENT COLLECTION OF FOURTEEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-TWO ORIGINAL WATER-COLOUR DRAWINGS OF NATURAL HISTORY SUBJECTS, by J. Van Huysum, C. Collins, P. Paillou, Eleazar Albin, G.D. Ehret and G. Webster, *loosely inserted* in 29 vol. *Old half calf*
>
> The Collection comprises:
> BIRDS: 659 Drawings, by C. Collins and P. Paillou, of English and Foreign Song Birds, Game Birds etc. in 16 vol.
>
> BEASTS: 265 Drawings, by C. Collins, of Animals from Hudson Bay, North America, Carolina, Brazil, Peru, India, Africa etc. in 6 vol.

> FLOWERS AND INSECTS, ETC: 495 Drawings, including 190 by J. Van Huysum, *signed, some on vellum*, the others by G.D. Ehret, of Flowers, Fruit, Dragonflies, and Butterflies, also of some Birds brought from Newfoundland by Sir Joseph Banks, etc. in 6 vol.
>
> FISHES, ETC: 22 Drawings of Fishes, Crocodiles and Tortoises, and 21 Drawings of Fungi, by C. Collins and E. Albin. in 1 vol.[1]

These large, colourful, often life-size drawings of exotic birds, mammals, reptiles, and fish, as well as equally imposing images of flowers, insects, and fungi, painted by the finest animal and botanical painters of eighteenth-century Britain, were loosely inserted into twenty-nine portfolios. The collection also contained images of North American birds and mammals—some, as the description noted, originally amassed by Joseph Banks on his 1766 voyage to Newfoundland with James Cook. In his descriptive catalogue of the Blacker Wood Library of Ornithology and Zoology, *An Introduction to the Literature of Vertebrate Zoology* … (1931), Wood described this offering as "what is in all probability the most notable collection of water-colour drawings that has engaged the attention of natural history devotees for many a year."[2] If Wood bid on this lot at Sotheby's, he was not successful. According to notes in the catalogue, a representative of the London-based bookseller Bernard Quaritch paid 500 pounds for the collection. Wood would not be content, however, to leave the drawings with Quaritch. With the founding of the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology at McGill University in 1919, Wood had developed a voracious appetite for anything related to ornithology, particularly rare illustrated books and original drawings of birds.

After he retired from his career as an ophthalmologist in 1920, Wood devoted himself to his two private passions—ornithology and book collecting. He attended auctions, badgered book dealers, and haunted bookshops wherever he travelled with his wife Emma Shearer Wood (1861-1951) [Fig 1]. In 1924, two years before the Sotheby's auction, Wood had purchased a collection of watercolour

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[1] Transcript of Sotheby's *Catalogue*, British Library, courtesy of Felicity Roberts.

[2] Casey A. Wood, *An Introduction to the Literature of Vertebrate Zoology: Based Chiefly on the Titles in the Blacker Library of Zoology, the Emma Shearer Wood Library of Ornithology, the Bibliotheca Osleriana, and Other Libraries of McGill University, Montreal*. McGill University Publications, Series XI (Zoology), no. 24, London, Oxford University Press, 1931, p. 131.

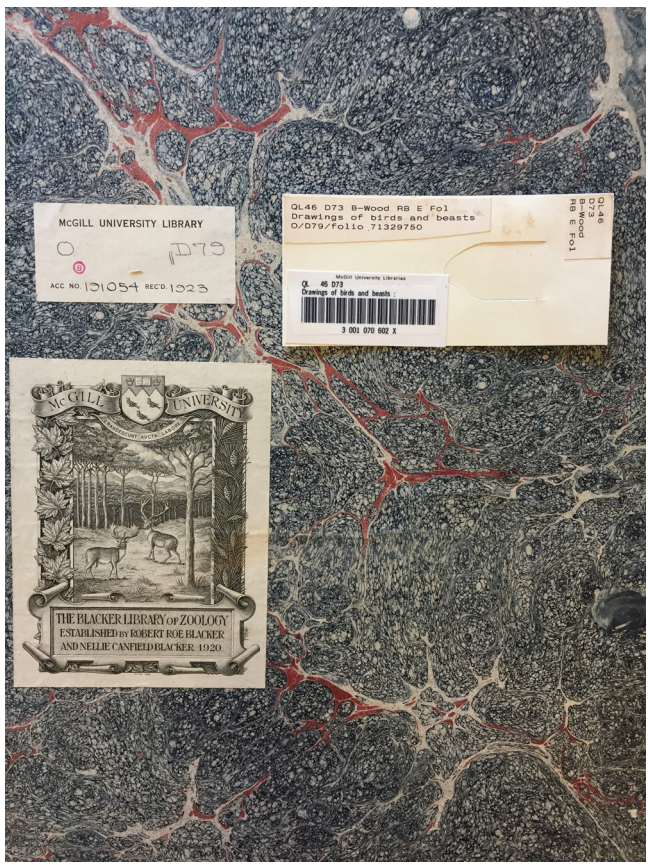

Figure 1. Caption: End Paper, with bookplate for Blacker Library of Zoology and catalogue label, bound collection eighteenth-century watercolours of birds and flowers. Blacker Wood Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library, elf QL46 D73.

drawings of birds by William Hayes (1735–1802) and his daughter Anne through Wheldon and Wesley, a London bookseller with whom he developed a long relationship. Hayes was best known for his *Portraits of Rare and Curious Birds, With Their Descriptions, from the Menagerie of Osterly* [sic] *Park* (1794), but these lovely watercolours were likely created for his earlier book, *A Natural History of British Birds, &c. With Their Portraits Accurately Drawn, and Beautifully Colored from Nature* (1775), which Wood had also bought from Wheldon and Wesley in September 1922. Wood noted with asperity

that this collection had "lain for more than 12 years" at Quaritch's.[3] While he built the library through subscriptions to journals and the acquisition of literally thousands of printed books, he was always on the lookout for the antique album or dust-covered portfolio lying neglected in the back of some shop. As a result of Wood's delight in the hunt and substantial personal resources, the Blacker Wood Natural History Collection at McGill now contains many albums and portfolios of natural history drawings from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Some of these have been researched and published such as the original drawings by Edward Lear (1812-88) and John Gould (1804-81) and Elizabeth Gould (1804-41),[4] but others are known only from entries in the library catalogue and Wood's brief descriptions in the *Introduction* under the category "Original Drawings" (pages 501 to 505). These vary from the working drawings of well-known natural history artists like William and Anne Hayes, mentioned above, to drawings of shells, birds, and birds' eggs by William Lewin (1747–95) and his son John (1770–1819), to watercolours by Henry Meyer (1797–1865) and his wife Mary Anne (c. 1806–80), to the remarkable drawings executed in Madras (now Chennai) by the relatively unknown Lady Elizabeth Gwillim (1763–1807), now the subject of a major study.[5] There are also drawings interleaved into published works, like the field sketches Thomas Jerdon (1811–72) made for a new edition of his book on Indian birds and Moses Griffith's (1749–1819) lovely vignettes painted in the margins of Thomas Pennant's (1726–98) own copy of *Arctic Zoology* (1792). The collection also includes the drawings Wood himself commissioned for *The Birds of Fiji* and *Manual of the Birds of Ceylon*.[6] Given his own interest in watching birds all over the world (Sri Lanka, Australia, Fiji, Guiana, Kashmir), Wood

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[3] Ibid. p. 503.

[4] See Robert Peck and David Attenborough, *The Natural History of Edward Lear (1812–1888)* (Jaffrey, New Hampshire, David R. Godine, 2016) and "John Gould: Bird Illustration in the Age of Darwin," an online exhibition and collection with a section on Elizabeth Gould, exhibits.lib.ku.edu/exhibits/show/gould/about. Accessed 14 February 2020.

[5] The Gwillim collection is the basis for a major international research project initiated by Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. The Gwillim collection can be viewed through the McGill Archival Collections Catalogue at archivalcollections.library.mcgill.ca/index.php/gwillim-collection.

[6] See the article by Anna Winterbottom in this issue.

also acquired notebooks and drawings of flora and fauna by earlier naturalist-observers like the French engineer René-Gabriel de Rabié (1717–85), who described the natural history of Saint-Domingue in the 1770s and early 1780s. There are equally delightful sketchbooks by anonymous artists (one who evidently visited New Orleans in the eighteenth century and painted the butterflies he or she saw there) and by naturalists like the English artist and fossil collector George Cumberland (1754–1848), who created a commonplace book of field observations dedicated to his son.

Wood also had an eye for the beautifully bound albums of painted birds and flowers created for the delight of the curious gentleman or lady. Too large to be held in the hand and lacking text beyond an occasional brief manuscript note, these compilations of works of differing sizes by various hands were objects of display to be appreciated either alone or in company with others. In 1923, again through Wheldon and Wesley, Wood acquired a massive 46 by 58 cm leather-bound volume of forty-two plates. To each page was glued an original watercolour surrounded by a pale rose and brown border inked by hand. [Fig 2] With only a few exceptions—three plates of flowers, including two watercolours by the great botanical artist Georg Ehret (1708–70), and two of fish—the album focuses on birds drawn by George Edwards (1694–1773), Peter Paillou (c. 1712–82), and Charles Collins (c. 1680–1744), pre-eminent natural history painters of eighteenth-century London. In 1926, Wood turned once more to Wheldon and Wesley and their agent, William John Henry Craddock (1870–1941),[7] to help him acquire the great folios of works by these same artists still languishing at Quaritch's after the Sotheby's auction. By September 1927, 938 drawings from the "magnificent collection" in lot 657A were purchased, packed, and en route to Montreal, to what was then called the Blacker Library of Zoology. On Wood's instructions, Craddock had acquired all twenty-three volumes—sixteen of birds, six of mammals, and one of "amphibia and pisces," all originally commissioned by Taylor White FRS, a British jurist and collector (1701–72). Quaritch had apparently attempted to break the collection by selling off volumes and drawings separately, something Craddock deplored in a letter

[7] In 1929, Craddock became the President of the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association in London.

Figure 2. Georg Ehret, *Musa (*Banana), watercolour on paper, c1750. Blacker Wood Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library elf QL46 D73.

to Wood as "infantile, and worse, a crime!"[8] Wood's purchase kept White's zoological collections together, though sadly, the six volumes of botanical and insect drawings sold separately appear to have disappeared from public view.[9]

Craddock did more than simply pack and ship the items; he also began an initial documentation. He went through every portfolio and numbered the drawings in ink, assigning what is now referred to as the identifying "Craddock number." He also numbered in pencil each of the loose manuscript notes written by White to accompany the images, "according to where it was found, regardless of its being correctly placed or not," and alerted Wood that it would require the work of a naturalist to assign them correctly.[10] In addition, he

[8] W.J.H. Craddock to Casey A. Wood, 26 September 1927, Casey Albert Wood Collection, MSG 1203. Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library.

[9] The author has been unable to locate these drawings, which might be identified by their inscriptions and numbering system in Taylor White's distinctive hand.

[10] Craddock, n.p. The Taylor White Project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2018–20), undertook this task in collaboration with the Redpath Museum at McGill and Dr. Robert Montgomerie of Queen's University.

provided Wood with evidence of the significance of the collection to Taylor White's contemporaries. Gilbert White (1720–93), author of *The Natural History & Antiquities of Selborne* (first published in 1789), was one of Wood's most beloved authors. Craddock noted in a letter to Daines Barrington (1727/28–1800), who was Taylor White's colleague on the Chester Bench, that Gilbert White had requested that Barrington arrange a visit to White's museum: "The Collection of Taylor White Esq[r] is often mentioned as curious in birds, etc.: can't I be introduced when in town, and see this Museum of my namesake's?"[11] Casey Wood was evidently delighted with his new acquisition. He included a detailed description of the Taylor White collection in his *Introduction to the Literature of Vertebrate Zoology*, which provides insight into what Wood felt made it so remarkable: "I understand that the previous owner of this remarkable collection rarely opened the portfolios in which the drawings were stored, and that this fact explains the freshness of the pictorial colours and the whiteness of the paper on which they were drawn nearly two hundred years ago. They have all the appearance of having been painted quite recently."[12] Today, almost a century after Wood acquired the drawings, they retain this freshness, which is all the more surprising in light of the manner of their creation and their use by the original owner as described below.

Thanks to the zealous Craddock, the manuscript catalogue written by Taylor White also survives as separate loose sheets keyed to the drawings. Many of the birds and mammals were identified by White himself, principally using John Ray's *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby …* (1678) and Carolus Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae* (various editions).[13] White commissioned the drawings from a number of artists. Upon receiving them, he wrote notes

[11] The passage is in square brackets, inserted by the editor, Richard Bowdler Sharpe, into the 1900 edition from original MS letters in the British Museum, and was not included in earlier published editions of *The Natural History*. Taylor White was no relation to Gilbert White. Gilbert White's *The Natural History & Antiquities of Selborne; &, A Garden Kalendar*, vol. 2, London, S.T. Freemantle, 1900, p. 17.

[12] Wood, *Introduction*, 503.

[13] For a review of Willughby and Ray's contributions to early ornithology, see Tim Birkhead, Ed., *Virtuoso by Nature: The Scientific Worlds of Francis Willughby FRS (1635–1672)* (Boston, Brill, 2016). For White's classification practice, see Céline Stantina, "Taylor White's 'paper museum' (1725–1772): Understanding the scientific work of an unpublished naturalist," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 75, 2021, pp. 543–57, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2020.0069.

and identifications in pencil on both the recto and verso; it is also evident from the handwriting and corrections that he revisited his drawings over the years, changing attributions and adding references. He also developed a numbering system for his portfolios, inscribing the volume number in Roman numerals followed by a number he assigned to each painting in an order which corresponded to his own classification system for birds and mammals. The identification of the subject is supplied in the artist's hand on the recto, or in some cases, in a comment on the verso. In addition, there is evidence of other hands, both on the drawings themselves and in the notes. Some of the catalogue notes, for example, are copied in fine cursive. One suspects that White may have requested that his wife or daughters recopy his often untidy scrawl, or perhaps he employed a secretary. Once the White portfolios came to McGill, the drawings received yet another layer of annotation, this time from Wood's long-suffering and somewhat under-appreciated librarian Henry Mousley (1865–1949). [Fig 3] Mousley began working at the Blacker Library in 1926, and the White portfolios must have been one of his first cataloguing challenges. He identified the birds and mammals as best he could, and his best was very good. Mousley was an accomplished naturalist, and he undertook to identify White's birds and beasts by their contemporary scientific names.[14] Thus, the White drawings display an intriguing palimpsest of knowledge inscribed in pencil on paper, from White's eighteenth-century descriptions and ordering system to Craddock's numerical catalogue to the comments of the artists and another unknown classifier, and finally, to Mousley's early twentieth-century scientific classifications. In the last iteration of this process, the drawings and manuscript notes have been digitized and made available online through the McGill University Archives, with a fully searchable catalogue and the subjects identified and re-named according to present-day scientific naming conventions.[15]

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[14] "Although born in Somerset, England, William Henry Mousley spent nearly half his life in Canada, in the province of Québec. At Hatley, Québec, he made a number of detailed studies of the fauna and flora and published a list of 160 or more species of the local birds. Most of his publications appeared in *The Auk* and *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. Mousley was a member of the American Ornithologists' Union." *Guide to the McGill University Archives*, vol. 4, archives.mcgill.ca/resources/guide/vol2_3/gen04.htm. Accessed 29 January 2021.

[15] The research project, "Undescrib'd: Taylor White's 'Paper Museum'," received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The drawings and notes were digitized and made available online through the

Figure 3. Charles Collins, Blue-fronted *(Amazona aestiva)*, watercolour on paper, April 1740. Showing artist's signature and date; Craddock number (top right); White volume number (bottom left); Mousley identification; inscription in unknown hand (bottom right). Blacker Wood Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library, MSG BW002-286.

Taylor White's Collections

Taylor White was born into a relatively prosperous landowning family in Nottinghamshire. His father, Thomas White (1667–1732), married the heiress Bridget Taylor (1682–1731) and moved to her family home at Wallingwells, originally a priory but much enlarged and with extensive grounds. Very little is known of Taylor White's

McGill University Archives (archivalcollections.library.mcgill.ca/index.php/taylor-white-collection).

early life. He was the second of five children, and in a portrait by Hans Hysing (1678–c. 1752) of the three eldest—John (1699–1768), Taylor, and their sister Bridget (b. 1703)—Taylor is depicted "holding up a jay newly shot," suggesting if not an early interest in birds, at least an acquaintance with them. Taylor White moved to London to study law at Lincoln's Inn at the age of nineteen, and qualified for the bar in 1727. He was elected to the Royal Society in 1725 at the age of twenty-four; his brother John was already a member, elected in 1723. While the White brothers had the patronage of Martin Folkes (1690–1754), soon to be President of the Society, it would seem by their early elections that they might have shared some interest in natural history.[16]

In 1733, Taylor White became a member of the Repository Committee, charged with periodic inspection of the Society's collections, which had been accumulating since its founding in the 1660s. In April 1733, the Committee began its review, meeting more or less weekly into the summer. In May, the members were fortunate to receive an invitation to visit the far vaster repository of Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), then President of the Royal Society, "in order to view the manner of the preserving and ranging of the severall [sic] sorts of Curiosities in his Collection, that they might the better judge what may be proper to be ordered in the Repository of the Royal Society."[17] Sloane's natural history collections were unparalleled. In addition to the enormous library of printed books and the equally enormous collections of mounted and preserved specimens, skins, minerals, gems, fossils, shells, corals, and herbarium sheets were "5,300 volumes of manuscripts in Medicine and Natural History, bound in beautiful bindings," as well as portfolios of original drawings of birds, fish, insects, mammals, snakes, and shells by European, Chinese, and Indian artists. In 1748, Pehr Kalm (1716–79), one of Linnaeus' "apostles" or travelling naturalists, would describe "such books as consisting of colored pictures of all sorts of Natural

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[16] Though election to the Royal Society at a young age was not unusual, there is some evidence of the White family's interest in nature. Wallingwells had ample grounds with well stocked fishponds and woods, and John White would later construct a grotto decorated with crystals found in the family lead mines. A "Mrs. White" is listed as a subscriber to Robert Furber's *Twelve Months of Flowers* (1730). As his brother John did not marry, she is perhaps Taylor White's mother or his first wife, Anne Errington, who died in October 1730.

[17] Minutes of a meeting of the Repository Committee of the Royal Society, 8 May 1733; GB 117, The Royal Society, Ref no. CMB/63/60.

objects. Such were Mariana's, Catesby's, Sebe's, Madame Blackwell's, &c."[18] Kalm might have been referring to both printed works, like Mark Catesby's *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* (which began publication in 1729), Albertus Seba's *Locupletissimi rerum naturalium thesauri accurata descriptio* (1734–65), or Elizabeth Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal* (1737–39), as well as folios of original drawings such as those by Catesby (1683–1749) or Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717). Sloane mounted his original drawings in bound albums, gluing the sheets to the pages and often making notes himself below the drawings or binding in letters and comments from the artists or other collectors. He had literally hundreds of drawings by artists like Everhard Kickius (fl. 1701–05), who also painted for another famous collector, the Duchess of Portland, Eleazar Albin (c. 1690–1742), George Edwards, and Jacob van Huysum (c1687–1740).

This experience must have left its mark on the young White, for after his visit to Sloane's collection, he began to acquire drawings by Jacob van Huysum. Van Huysum came from a family of Dutch flower painters. He left the Netherlands in 1721 and moved to England, where he began a successful career as a botanical artist.[19] In 1728, he prepared most of the drawings for John Martyn's *Historia Plantarum Rariorum* (1728–37) and was then commissioned by the Society of Gardeners to illustrate their *Catalogus Plantarum* (1730). He followed these commissions in 1733 with a series of lavish oil paintings, the *Twelve Months of Flowers*, an evident advertisement of his skills (now in the collections of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). In May 1734, White showed his fellow Royal Society members a selection of plants painted for him by van Huysum at only three shillings apiece, and he recommended to the Council of the Royal Society that they consider this means of preserving at least some of the specimens

[18] Pehr Kalm, *Kalm's Account of His Visit to England: On His Way to America in 1748*. Translated by Joseph Lucas, London and New York, Macmillan, 1892, p. 105. Kalm refers to "Mariana", or Maria Sibylla Merian, author of *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* (1705).

[19] After his arrival in London, Jacob van Huysum initially worked drawing plants for Sir Robert Walpole and Charles Lockyer of the South Sea Company. Lockyer had substantial grounds surrounding his house at Ealing and his country estates, and had also written about the flora of India. Walpole was a noted art collector and van Huysum lived for some time at Walpole's Houghton Hall, where he decorated the "attic" storey. Both Lockyer and Walpole were also members of the Royal Society.

under their care.[20] Every year since 1722, under the terms of Sir Hans Sloane's gift of land for the Physic Garden in Chelsea, the Society had received a shipment of dried plants. Dried plants on herbarium sheets were notoriously susceptible to damage, as White likely observed in the examination of the Repository collections. A plant rendered by a competent painter onto paper could not only capture the character of the living plant, but also represent its colour and habit of growth, and was easier to store and preserve. In July 1734, the Council adopted Taylor White's sensible recommendation and ordered that Philip Miller (1691–1771), gardener for the Society of Apothecaries, make a selection of rare plants from Chelsea to be captured on paper not only by van Huysum, but also by the recently arrived German botanical artist Georg Ehret. Miller chose the succulent aloes, so difficult to keep as dried specimens, and the results are still available in all their glorious colour in the Archives of the Royal Society.[21]

After White's recommendation was accepted by the Council, the Society likely tasked him to engage the artists, providing him with the opportunity to continue building his own collection and aiding the collecting activities of his equally enthusiastic friends, like Sir Joseph Ayloffe (1708–81) and Robert More (1703–86), both members of the Royal Society and the Repository Committee. More was elected to Parliament at the age of twenty-four and was a contemporary of White as well as a colleague of Taylor White's brother, John. In 1731, More inherited property and gardens in Shropshire and became a respected botanist. Sir Joseph Ayloffe was Taylor White's fellow student at Lincoln's Inn, and later a well-known antiquary. In June 1734, White wrote to More that his collection of plants had increased greatly "both from seed and the plants that he bought in pots" and that, in time, he would become More's rival if More "minds his weeds and neglects his plants"—perhaps an allusion to an interest in botany rather than gardening?[22] White also described a book of drawings he was compiling for More, though he was "vexed at the extravagance

[20] See the account in Ruth Stungo, "Recording the Aloes at Chelsea—a singular solution to a difficult problem," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 50, 1996, pp. 47–57, https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.1996.0004.

[21] The aloes are available online in the Royal Society Picture Library. See pictures.royalsociety.org/home.

[22] In the 1730s, Taylor White lived in Serles Court (later New Court), Lincoln's Inn, in the centre of London, but his family estate would certainly have provided room for gardens.

of the price."[23] White boasted that his own portfolio was already so full "it will hold no more drawings."[24] A month later (25 July 1734), Philip Miller wrote to More from Chelsea:

> The Painter [van Huysum] applies himself closely to work at present. and generally makes 16 or 18 drawings a week, but M[r]. White has permitted him to make one of each sort for S[r]. Joseph Ayloff [sic], so that the number for you and M[r]. White is about 10 or 12 each week. but now he is beginning to put the Fruits to those drawings which were done in the Spring for which he is to be paid in proportion to the work there is in each. he has finished about 30 drawings since M[r]. White left London for which I have paid him and is now at work upon three sorts more; he performs much better than when you was in Town.[25]

Very little of Taylor White's correspondence has been found, and these letters are the first written evidence that he had embarked on what became his life's avocation—documenting the natural world.

Creating the Drawings

In March 1736, Taylor White and a friend paid a visit to another well-known artist, George Edwards, the beadle of the Royal College of Physicians. White had already presented to the Society, in January 1734/5, a watercolour by Edwards of a 'Long-tailed Hummingbird painted after a specimen from Black River, Jamaica, which had been contributed the previous November by the astronomer Colin Campbell (d. 1742). Edwards had not yet published his *A Natural history of uncommon birds, and of some other rare and undescribed animals* (1743–51), which brought him renown throughout Europe, but he was already praised as a painter of natural history subjects and was "painter-in-residence" for Hans Sloane. The visit to Edwards may have acted as an additional spur to White, for that same year, he engaged the Irish artist Charles Collins (c. 1680–1744) to supply him with drawings of birds. Collins was trained as a still life painter

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23 Van Huysum had apparently raised his fee from three shillings per plant to nine shillings. Stungo, "Recording the Aloes at Chelsea", p. 48.

24 Taylor White to Robert More, 15 June 1734; Shropshire Archives, document 9071/A/9/2/1.

25 Charles Collins in London to Robert More in Shrewsbury, 17 July 1742; Shropshire Archives, document 4947/7/22.

and had moved to England perhaps as early as 1730.[26] By 1732, he was painting fruits to Pieter Casteels' designs for Robert Furber's *Twelve Months of Fruit*. In September 1736, Collins announced his own project with the naturalist collector John Lee of Essex to produce "a Collection of the small Birds that are to be met with in this Kingdom."[27] He advised potential subscribers that while there had been "a great many prints of Foreign Birds publish'd, … very little Notice has been taken of our own, which are a great Number, and of great Variety of Colours …" He assured subscribers that the birds he depicted would not only be well drawn, but would also be "coloured to the greatest Exactness" and "shewn in the liveliest and best Manner."[28] The copper engravings were executed by Henry Fletcher and James Mynde, and sold "Two Guineas colour'd and One Guinea uncolour'd."[29] White must have been intrigued by the announcement and may have been a subscriber to Collins' work, which depicts a total of 115 individual birds representing fifty-eight species, all with their common English names of the period.[30] [Fig 4] In the *Icones*, the birds are drawn in natural attitudes, pleasingly arranged in compositions not atypical of the Dutch animalier master Melchior de Hondecoeter (c. 1636–95) or those of Collins' near-contemporaries Marmaduke Cradock (1660–1717) and Pieter Casteels III (1684–1749). In the White portfolios at Blacker Wood are nineteen watercolour drawings of birds by Collins that also feature

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26 A "Charles Collins" appears as a subscriber to Robert Furber's *Twelve Months of Flowers*, which was published in 1730.

27 *Daily Gazetteer* (London Edition), Wednesday 1 September 1736, Issue 369. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection.

28 Collins also created twelve oil paintings documenting English bird life. Nine of the oil paintings are currently hanging at the UK National Trust site Anglesey Abbey. The oil paintings are on a relatively small scale and may have been created as "templates" for the similarly sized engravings, though these are not mirror images—a common practice when paintings are transferred to paper.

29 Blacker-Wood is fortunate to have acquired a complete set of the now rare hand-coloured copper engravings published by Thomas Bowles and John Bowles and Son, as well as an incomplete set "Design'd by Charles Collins & Publish'd by Him and John Lee According to Act of Parliament September the 29th, 1736," RBSC Blacker Wood elf QL674 C655.

30 The addition of a numbered key and the inclusion of only British birds distinguish Collins' set from the earlier set of twelve etchings of domestic and exotic birds created by Pieter Casteels III in 1726, which are considered the first of their kind in England. The birds are also identified by common English names; the 1730s saw the adoption of English over Latin in many areas, including the law courts and the records of the Royal Society.

Figure 4. James Mynde, after Charles Collins, *Icones Avium, cum nominibus anglicis*, P. 8, hand-coloured engraving, 1736. Blacker Wood Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library, elf QL674 C655.

in the *Icones* but are now painted life-size in full colour, perched on artistically twisted twigs. They are signed and dated between 1736 and 1743. At first, White must have accepted Collins copying birds directly from the *Icones*, but by 1738, even if a bird was featured in the *Icones*, Collins was preparing fresh drawings for White, more acutely observed and corrected. For example, in the *Icones*, Collins depicts a pair of grey wagtails, but both birds appear similar. The pair of Grey Wagtails painted for White in 1738, however, show the appropriate sex-specific breeding plumages.

Collins did not work exclusively for White, and White acted as an intermediary between the artist and other collectors. In July 1740, White wrote to More, "I send you in answer by the Mondays carrier Ten Drawings of Collins. 12 of Ehret of Plants & 2 of Buterflyes on Vellum…"[31] Taylor White may, however, have been Collins' most demanding employer. In 1742, Collins wrote to More that White was pestering him about a grouse: "… M[r]. White has askd me severall

[31] Taylor White to Robert More, 17 July 1740; Shropshire Archives, document 4947/7/53.

times why I did not begin it. for he wants to se [sic] it."[32] From 1736 until his death in 1744, Collins created 187 watercolour drawings of birds for White, from domestic species to exotics, including parrots, lories, and little auks, as well as a few mammals. From his charming Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) painted in 1736 to the magnificent Blue-fronted Amazon parrot (*Amazona aestiva*) drawn in May 1740, to his last signed painting dated May 1743—a pair of Eurasian Wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)—Collins' paper birds are active, engaging, and accurate.

Though he may have mourned the loss of this capable artist, almost immediately after Collins' death, White engaged Peter Paillou another reputable painter, to continue the work of depiction. Paillou represents the next generation of natural history artists. Descended from a Huguenot family that emigrated to London in the seventeenth century, he became a well-respected painter, especially of birds, and a member of the Society of Artists, working not only for White but also for George Edwards, Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), and Thomas Pennant (1726–98). There are 138 signed works by Paillou in the White collection, but it is evident on stylistic grounds that most of the remaining birds and mammals (over 500) are by this painter. [Fig 5] The earliest signed work dates to possibly January 1744, and the last works commissioned by Taylor White date to 1771, when White was already in declining health. (White borrowed two specimens from the British Museum in July of that year, which were painted by Paillou; White died in early spring 1772.) Like Collins, Paillou also painted in oil, and Robert More commissioned from him a number of large canvasses of birds in dramatic landscapes for the dining room of his rebuilt Linley Hall. Thomas Pennant also recorded that Paillou painted "for my hall at Downing, several pictures of birds and animals, attended with suitable landscapes. Four were intended to represent the climates." While Pennant employed Paillou into the 1780s, he complained that he was "too fond of giving gaudy colours to his subjects."[33] Paillou was undoubtedly constrained by his employers' demands for exact colouring and characteristic postures, and it is evident that his work was also constrained by the condition of the sitters (as was Collins' work). From the liveliness of their

[32] Collins to More, London, 17 July 1742; Shropshire Archives, document 4947/7/22.

[33] Thomas Pennant, *The literary life of the late Thomas Pennant, Esq.*, London, Benjamin White, 1793, p. 3.

Figure 5. Peter Paillou, "Porphyry-tailed Mango" (Anthracorax mango), watercolour and gouache on paper, 1754. Blacker Wood Collection, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library, MSG BW002-711.

postures, Paillou must have painted some birds or mammals from living creatures, but he was obliged to paint many more from dead and mounted specimens or skins, and the depictions suffer as a result. Despite his popularity, even Paillou's best work cannot compare with that of Collins, who professed to be not only a painter but also a watcher of birds and did indeed breathe life into his subjects.

The Portfolios

When White's friend Robert More died in 1780, "A Capital Collection of upwards of Eleven Hundred original Drawings of exotic and indigenous plants, fungesses, insects, quadrupeds, birds, and fish, by Ehret, Edwards, Albin, Collins, Paillou, Van Huysum &c." was taken from Linley Hall in Shropshire and sold at auction in London. While More's collection was broken up and dispersed, White's collection was spared the same fate until the twentieth century. The White family maintained the portfolios as Taylor White left them and rarely opened them, accounting, as Casey Wood noted, for their excellent state of preservation and fresh colours. The quality of the paper also contributed to their condition. As almost all the drawings were executed on similar-sized laid paper, measuring on average 55 by 38 cm, White either supplied the paper to his artists or may have insisted they use this paper size. White must have chosen this size so that his artists could paint most of the birds (though not the mammals) life-size, and he frequently notes in pencil on the back of a drawing that a bird is "the size of life." The paper came from the mills of Jean Villadary in France (similar to the paper used for herbarium collections like that of Linnaeus' employer George Clifford) and from other French and Dutch suppliers, as well as from James Whatman at Turkey Mill in England.

That the drawings remain so fresh and undamaged is surprising, given White's use of them. It is evident from a few remaining sources that he saw his portfolios as prized possessions and was delighted to show them to the curious. Around 1750, the French conchologist and author A. Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville (1680–1765) made the rounds of the great collections of London and included Taylor White's collection, which he described as "one of the most curious in London for its excellent choice of shells, insects, birds, fish and plants, arranged in eight folio volumes."[34] In 1763, when another French scientist visited, the collection had grown to "ten volumes of birds and five of quadrupeds drawn large and painted in natural colours, many of plants, trees, etc.," as well as of "birds applied to glass

[34] Author's translation of "une des plus curieuses de Londres pour le beau choix des coquilles, des insectes, des oiseaux, des poissons & des plantes, rangées en huit volumes in-folio." A. Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, *La conchyliologie, ou, Histoire naturelle des coquilles de mer, d'eau douce, terrestres et fossiles: avec un traité de la zoomorphose, ou, représentation des animaux que les habitent ... Troisième édition* ... Paris, Chez Guillaume Debure fils aîné, 1780, p. 324.

with their feathers, by his wife and his children."[35] At White's death, there remained at Wallingwells "29 volumes containing 987 body colour drawings, atlas size, of birds, flowers, fruit, monkeys, etc., by Ehrert [sic], Van Huysen [sic], Peter Paillou, Collins, etc." This was the collection sold at Sotheby's in 1926.[36] Unlike Hans Sloane and many other collectors of the period, however, White did not appear to have bound the drawings into albums, and this decision provides insight into how White used his collection. Not only was White happy to show the portfolios to visitors, but he was also generous in lending both his specimens and drawings to other naturalists for study or copying. The images available in printed books like Ray and Willughby's *Ornithology* (1678), Eleazar Albin's *A Natural History of Birds* (1731–38), or Catesby and Edwards were often distorted through the processes of reproduction, and poorly coloured or not coloured at all. Even Edwards, whose works Linnaeus praised as "an ornament to the age in which we live" and from whose printed images the Swedish naturalist made specific identifications, was not necessarily a reliable visual source, as his original specimens were sometimes damaged or poorly rendered in the etchings.[37]

Edwards benefitted from the generosity of the "obliging and curious Taylor White, Esq" in sharing the drawings; Edwards used them to confirm his own renderings or compare species. White also insisted that his artists render the birds to scale, accurately coloured

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35 Joseph Jérôme Lefrançais De Lalande, *Diary of a Trip to England 1763*. Translated from the original manuscript by Richard Watkins, Kingston, Australia, 2002, 2014, p. 21, watkinsr.id.au/Lalande.pdf.

36 White, *Memoirs*, 50. The "feather paintings" by his wife and daughters are another story entirely, and one that deserves further exploration. Blacker Wood holds a number of eighteenth-century feather "paintings" of birds, as well as the extraordinary early seventeenth-century "Feather Book." See digital.library.mcgill.ca/featherbook/.

37 For example, in 1764, Linnaeus wrote to Edwards requesting clarification of the drawing of wasps on plate 336 in *Gleanings*: "But, what chiefly induces me now to write, is your tab. 336, in which you represent some 'Vegetating Wasps,' and which appear to be *Vespae*, provided they have four wings, a circumstance I wish to be informed of. My thoughts are so taken up with these productions, that I cannot sleep with out dreaming of them. I conjure you, by the Author of Nature, to write to me the first day you can spare, to explain this phaemomenon [sic]." Carolus Linnaeus to George Edwards, 13 April 1764, translated from the Latin in James Edward Smith, *A selection of the correspondence of Linnaeus and other naturalists, from the original manuscripts*, vol. II, London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1821, pp. 503–5. Edwards had drawn the "wasps" with only two wings apiece.

with little extraneous ornamentation. The drawings often included outlines with pencilled measurements on the verso, particularly for larger birds. Comparing the detail of Collins' or Paillou's birds with the often stiff or poorly coloured images available in printed references, it is understandable that Edwards would want to consult these originals painted "from life."[38] For example, Edwards had drawn a Little Brown Bittern (from a specimen brought from Aleppo), and on his plate had added an inset drawing of a similar bird taken from a print and described by "Dr Shaw in his Travels in Barbary and the Levant, pa. 255." Edwards then compared Dr. Shaw's bittern with a drawing in White's collection: "The larger Bird figured in the plate is drawn less than life, the bird being about the size of a Lapwing of Plover … This Bird was brought from Aleppo by Dr Russel, who gave me liberty to make a drawing of it … the small figure in the plate … is from Dr. Shaw's print, and coloured from his description … Taylor White, Esq; shewed me the drawing of a Bird agreeing very nearly with what Dr. Shaw has figured and described, having the top of the head black; which Bird, I think he told me, was shot in Wales."[39] [Fig. 6] Edwards also consulted White's other collections, which included dried specimens as well as living birds. White's urban menagerie housed at various times Peregrine Falcon from Hudson's Bay, a Sparrowhawk, and a small bird from Brazil, the Blue-Black Grassquit that White called the Steel Bird or Jacarini. Edwards wrote that in drawing for the plate "The Malacca Gros-beak, the Jacarini, and the Small Yellow Butterfly" in *Gleanings of Natural History* (1760), White had "favoured me with a sight of them. The first was a dried specimen, called by those who brought it from India the Malacca Wren; which name I chose to alter, the bird having nothing of the Wren in it but its size. The second bird was living in a cage, which I could not have home with me: so that I only drew and coloured it

[38] Contemporary researchers are equally impressed by the authenticity of the drawings, which have permitted them to identify the birds according to twenty-first-century scientific classification and nomenclature. See Robert Montgomerie and Vida Javidi, 'Ornithological Insights from Taylor White's Birds,' *Notes and Records,* vol. 75, no. 4, 2021, pp. 581–98 https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2020.0066.

[39] George Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History, Exhibiting Figures of Quadrupeds, Birds, Insects, Plants, &c.: Most of Which Have Not, Till Now, Been Either Figured or Described. With Descriptions of Seventy Different Subjects, Designed, Engraved, and Coloured After Nature, on Fifty Copper-Plate Prints*, Part II, London, printed for the author at the Royal College of Physicians–in Warwick-Lane, 1758, p. 137.

Figure 6. Left: Attributed to Peter Paillou, "Great bittern" (Botaurus stellaris), watercolour on paper, n.d. Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library, MSG BW002-740; right: George Edwards, "The Little Brown Bittern," Gleanings of Natural History … , Part II, (1760) Pl. 275, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill Library.

by memory but afterwards compared my draught with the bird, and found that they nearly agreed."[40]

There is also an intriguing reference in Joseph Banks' correspondence to a "Mr. White" who called upon Banks at Thomas Pennant's request, and left with Banks "some Specimens of Birds one of which M: Atricapilla I had not seen the others M: Trochilus & M: Montifringilla". Banks wrote that he intended "tomorrow to Call upon him at Horaces head & hold Ornithological Converse".[41]

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40 Edwards, *Gleanings* II, 203.

41 Prior to the standardization of scientific nomenclature, identification of specimens based on name only can be difficult. 'M' might refer to the Muscicapidae, or the family of Old World flycatchers and chats, used by Banks to refer to a number of small birds now known by different names. White's collection did contain drawings of three small birds that might be those described by Banks: the Pied Flycatcher (*Muscicapa atricapilla*), the Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), and the Brambling (*Fringilla montefringilla*). Banks to Pennant, 5 May 1767, Letter 10 in Neil Chambers, Ed., *Scientific Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks,*

Horace's Head was a tavern next to Benjamin White's Booksellers, the first to specialise in books on natural history and a meeting place for naturalists. (Benjamin White was brother to Gilbert White of Selborne, and no relation to Taylor White.) It is not clear whether Taylor White provided Banks with a small parcel of specimens or a portfolio of drawings, but it is apparent that White's collection served as a kind of reference resource for naturalists. For Thomas Pennant, the drawings may also have served as a convenient source of illustrations for his published works. In his *Synopsis of Quadrupeds* (1771), Pennant acknowledges the contribution of drawings by George Edwards, George Stubbs (1724–1806), and Peter Paillou, as well as some drawings borrowed from Sir Hans Sloane's collection in the British Museum. There are, however, a number of images of mammals evidently engraved after drawings in the White collection, such as a hyena, two lynxes, and a hog. It might be that Paillou simply made copies of these works for Pennant; nevertheless, it is also possible that the "obliging Mr. White" lent the originals to his friend Thomas Pennant, as he had done for George Edwards, or provided Pennant with copies, as he did for Robert More. White may have had some hopes of publishing his own work, as he told Daniel Solander (1733–82), one of Linnaeus' "apostles," at a meeting of the Royal Society in 1762. Solander recounts in a letter to the naturalist John Ellis (1710–76) that Mr. White "intends to publish his figures in a large work, of which he has hopes that the King will be at the expence."[42] The King evidently did not comply, and the elegant and brilliantly coloured paper birds in Mr. White's portfolios continued as an unpublished reference collection for his contemporaries. We owe a debt to the White family for their careful preservation of these drawings for one hundred and fifty years until they entered the marketplace, and to William Craddock for the zeal with which he pursued this "magnificent collection." Finally, thanks are due to Casey Wood, who sought out these unique treasures for the collection that would eventually bear his name.

1765–1820, Volume I, The Early period, 1765–1784; Letters 1765–1782, London, Pickering and Chatto, 2007, p. 12. Thanks to Céline Stantina for this reference.

42 Daniel C. Solander to John Ellis, London, 5 March 1762, in Smith, *A selection of the correspondence of Linnaeus* II, pp. 9–10.

Biography

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