

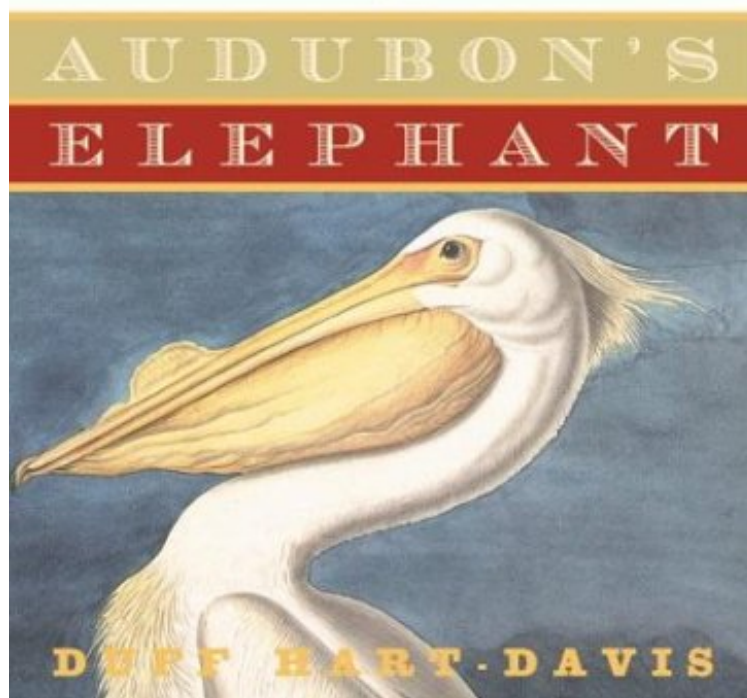
(Free) Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of The Birds of America

Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of The Birds of America

Duff Hart-Davis

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AMERICA'S GREATEST NATURALIST AND THE MAKING OF THE BIRDS OF AMERICA



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Duff Hart-Davis : Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of The Birds of America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of The Birds of America:

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Very interesting...for a short while By Judy K. Polhemus I wish I could say which ran out of steam first (if I may use a cliché)--the book or me. "Audubon's Elephant: America's Greatest Naturalist and the Making of the Birds of America" began as such a promising book, but by mid-point I could read no more than a page or two without my mind blanking out from word fatigue. Yes, I learned quite a bit about Audubon's beginnings, how he came to America to escape Napoleon's armies, how he fell in love with the wildness of America, with its birds in particular. This is a story of one man, who happened to be in all the right places at the right

time (and including not-so-right places). His own physique and physical stamina aided him in incredible feats of long distance walking and hunting. His love of the natural world and indomitable curiosity eventually led him into the task that has made him world famous and admired--painting scientifically the birds of America. But it was not America who would appreciate his work of presenting the birds in their actual size on paper--paper large enough to accurately show that size. The Wild Turkey became the standard for the double-elephant folio. The creation of this double-elephant book depicting 433 birds of America is the subject of "Audubon's Elephant." As with most artists, Audubon had his quirks. He didn't make much of a living for his wife and two sons, whom he left in America while he sought subscribers for his one hundred pound book first in Scotland, then in England and France. He kept detailed journals and wrote gushing and reflective letters to his faithful wife, even admitting attractions to other women. I made it halfway through "Audubon's Elephant" before I finally put it down and have begun reading another story of Audubon's arduous efforts to have his book published. This second book, *Under a Wild Sky: John James Audubon and the Making of The Birds of America*, is a Pulitzer Prize Finalist and written in narrative form instead of lacing together bits and pieces. Nonetheless, I accept the fault as mine and not that of the author, Duff Hart-Davis, that I had trouble maintaining interest in his book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Audubon's Elephant By Marie McMillen Excellent biography of Audubon. Most interesting, well written. I liked it so much I bought a copy for myself give the original to a friend! 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Exceptional book By omaomaoma The "back story" of a very notable, classic book. Put to rest some tales about the prints Audubon produced so many years ago.

A vividly illustrated account of John James Audubon's struggle in England to complete his masterpiece, *The Birds of America*. Audubon's Elephant was the nickname given to John James Audubon's masterpiece, *The Birds of America*, an oversized folio of 435 life-size ornithological prints that remains to this day the most compelling depiction of bird life in the United States. Born in Haiti and raised in France, Audubon spent much of his adult life as a struggling American businessman on the frontier, where his obsession with birds nearly brought him to financial ruin. In 1826, his ambitious project was also in a precarious position; his folio remained unfinished, without an American publisher willing to fund it. Had Audubon not set sail for England, his artistic triumph might easily have turned into failure. *Audubon's Elephant* tells the story of the naturalist's unlikely success in Britain as a self-exiled artist in search of the money and inspiration necessary to complete his life's work. During twelve years spent traveling in Liverpool, Edinburgh, London, and Paris, Audubon won the interest of wealthy families, fellow artists, and the public with his eccentric brilliance and woodsman's charisma, ultimately securing enough subscriptions to publish *The Birds of America*. Duff Hart-Davis, himself a naturalist, has written a lively, highly engaging biography of Audubon's heady and memorable days as a great American artist abroad.

From *Publishers Weekly* With precision and detail, Hart-Davis, an English nature writer, tells the story of Audubon's years in England and Europe trying to sell his unwieldy masterpiece. Audubon, at 41 years old a peripatetic woodsman and artist, sailed for England, carrying a 100-pound portfolio of his bird paintings (his "elephant" or double-elephant color folio format). Full of quotations from Audubon's lively, honest diaries and letters, Hart-Davis's book portrays this man of exuberance and determination as he walked 165 miles from Kentucky to Ste. Genevieve, Mo., on the Mississippi River trying to collect funds owed him. Facing bankruptcy in America, Audubon sailed to Europe and slowly but surely met wealthy, connected families like the Rathbones in England and men like William Home Lizars in Edinburgh, who was to become Audubon's first printer. Despite bitter competition from the supporters of another ornithologist (George Ord) and long separations from his wife, Lucy, and their children, Audubon prevailed, meeting Sir Walter Scott and securing subscriptions from King George IV and other members of the royal family. Because the book focuses mainly on the years of Audubon's European travels, one doesn't get a full picture of the man, and readers may question the importance of the minutiae of meals and weather on his journey. However, solid research, fine writing and details of 19th-century society make this a worthwhile book for historians, artists and Audubon enthusiasts alike. What stands out most are the 31 bw and 41 color illustrations throughout. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Booklist* The Audubon shelf is full to bursting, but so unusual was the naturalist-artist's adventurous life, and so magnificent is his achievement, room must be made for more. In this handsomely illustrated volume, Hart-Davis, a British chronicler of country life, focuses on Audubon's years in Edinburgh and London (1826-38), during which he oversaw the complex production of his unwieldy masterpiece, *The Birds of America*, a double-elephant folio comprising colored engravings on heavy sheets of paper measuring 39 1/2 by 29 1/2 inches. Writing with undisguised delight in his subject and drawing on Audubon's expressive journals, Hart-Davis provides a lively account of every phase of Audubon's audacious undertaking, from his often maddening campaign for subscriber support for his expensive project to the machinations of his enemies, his arduous journeys and prodigious artistic efforts, his wife's great loyalty and sacrifice, and his struggle to write his *Ornithological Biography*. Hart-Davis profiles such key people as engraver Robert Havell and Audubon's coauthor, William MacGillivray, and succeeds in awakening new appreciation for a truly original man and his paradigm-altering art and ecological insights.

Donna Seaman Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "Hart-Davis is captivated...his account of Audubon's 12-year sojourn...offers a portrait of the man himself and a trove of fascinating detail." Wall Street Journal "Writing with undisguised delight in his subject and drawing on Audubon's expressive journals, Hart-Davis provides a lively account." Booklist "A worthwhile book for historians, artists and Audubon enthusiasts alike." Publishers Weekly "Beautifully illustrated and will foster renewed interest in Audubon, not only for his art, but also for the man." Michael McCarthy, Independent [a] vividly written and copiously illustrated book. Simon Barnes, Times "An exceptionally vivid account of an extraordinary man and his equally extraordinary project. Michael Prodger, Sunday Telegraph "The great glory of Audubon's Elephant is its own colour illustrations, which reproduce more than 30 of the original plates. Robin Blake, Financial Times