



NEWS RELEASE

1/11/2017

Contacts: Stephanie Elton, Marketing Communications Manager
419-255-8000 ext. 7428
selton@toledomuseum.org

Emily Rippe Desmond, Marketing and Public Relations Specialist
419-255-8000 ext. 7301
edesmond@toledomuseum.org

Toledo Museum of Art Displays Historical Bird Prints by ‘Father of American Ornithology’

TOLEDO, Ohio – The Toledo Museum of Art’s (TMA) first edition of Alexander Wilson’s pioneering multi-volume publication *American Ornithology; or The Natural History of the Birds of the United States* will take center stage when the exhibition *Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson’s Birds of the United States* opens April 21, 2018.

The exhibition is curated by Paula Reich, the Museum’s head of interpretive projects and managing editor.

“The prints are not only beautifully-produced with vibrant hand coloring, but they are historically important as the first attempt at a comprehensive natural history study of American birds,” said Reich. “It’s also the first major scientific study published in the country.”

Fourth in TMA’s biennial exhibitions focused on bird-themed art, *Before Audubon* coincides with the Biggest Week in American Birding festival, which brings tens of thousands of birders to the shores of Lake Erie to observe the spring migration of songbirds.

“The Museum began organizing these bird-themed exhibitions in 2012 in recognition of the growing fascination with birding in the Toledo area,” said Brian Kennedy, Edward Drummond and Florence Scott Libbey Director.

Before John James Audubon published his famous *Birds of America* (1827-1838), the Scottish-born Alexander Wilson, known as the “Father of American Ornithology,” laid out much of the groundwork with his *American Ornithology; or The Natural History of the Birds of the United States* series, which he began publishing in 1808.

Though Wilson had no background as an artist, he taught himself to draw accurate illustrations for the 76 hand-colored engraved and etched plates in his nine volumes of careful observations of the birds of the eastern United States—314 species in all, 26 of which he was the first to identify. Five of these new species are now named for him.

In addition to Wilson’s nine-volume publication, visitors can view a selection of framed prints by Wilson from regional collections, including the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, and two prints by Audubon from the Museum’s collection.

Many of the birds represented in the exhibition can be seen during the spring migration that occurs in the region, including colorful warblers and other songbirds, ducks, and shorebirds. This year, the Biggest Week in American Birding will take place May 4-13, 2018. It is organized by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory in Oak Harbor, Ohio.

“The Biggest Week attracts tens of thousands of birders from around the world,” said Reich. “The warblers are the stars that everyone wants to see, including Wilson’s Warbler, named for the ornithologist. Wilson’s illustration of the beloved bird is featured in the exhibition.”

Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson’s Birds of the United States is supported in part by 2018 Exhibition Program Sponsor ProMedica. Admission to the exhibition is free. It will be on view in Gallery 18 from April 18 through July 15, 2018. For more information about the exhibition and related programming, visit toledomuseum.org.

###

The Toledo Museum of Art is a nonprofit arts institution funded through individual donations, foundation grants, corporate sponsorships and investments. The Ohio Arts Council helps fund programs at the Toledo Museum of Art through a sustainability grant program that encourages economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. Glass Pavilion® and Toledo Museum of Art Glass Pavilion® are registered service marks.

Admission to the Museum is free. The Museum is open Tuesday and Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sunday, Noon to 5 p.m.; and is closed Monday and major holidays. Thursday evening hours are sponsored by Huntington Wealth Advisors. Friday evening hours are made possible by Fifth Third Bank.

The Museum is located at 2445 Monroe Street at Scottwood Avenue, just west of the downtown business district and one block off I-75 with exit designations posted. For general information, visitors can call 419-255-8000 or 800-644-6862, or visit toledomuseum.org.