



FACT SHEET

April 20, 2018

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Exhibition: *Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson's Birds of the United States*

Dates: April 21–July 15, 2018

Venue: Toledo Museum of Art- Gallery 18

Admission: Free

Content: In 1808, Scottish-born poet and amateur naturalist Alexander Wilson (1766–1813) began publishing *American Ornithology; or The Natural History of the Birds of the United States*. Wilson's impressive achievement inspired John James Audubon to publish his much better-known *Birds of America* (1827–38).

Though Wilson had no background as an artist, he taught himself drawing and illustrated his nine volumes of careful observations of the birds of the northeastern U.S. with 76 hand-colored engraved and etched plates of 314 species—26 of which he was the first to describe.

Highlights: *Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson's Birds of the United States* offers a rare opportunity to view all nine of Wilson's first-edition volumes of *American Ornithology; or The Natural History of the Birds of the United States*.

In addition to the leather-bound books, visitors can view a selection of framed prints by Wilson from regional collections—the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan and a private collector—and two prints by Audubon from the Toledo Museum of Art collection.

A free curator presentation on the exhibition will take place on May 10 in the Little Theater. A tour of the exhibition with the curator will take place immediately following the presentation.

Significance: Fourth in the Toledo Museum of Art's biennial exhibitions focused on bird-themed art, this will be the first time that the Museum's first edition of Alexander Wilson's pioneering multi-volume publication, *American Ornithology; or The Natural History of Birds of the United States*, has been exhibited.

Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson's Birds of the United States will be on view exclusively at TMA from April 21 to July 15, 2018 and coincides with the regional birding festival the Biggest Week in American Birding, which brings tens of thousands of birders to the area to observe the spring migration of songbirds.

Credits: *Before Audubon: Alexander Wilson's Birds of the United States* is supported in part by 2018 Exhibition Program Sponsor ProMedica.

Curator: Paula Reich, Head of Interpretive Projects and Managing Editor

Information: Interviews with the curator are available by request.

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