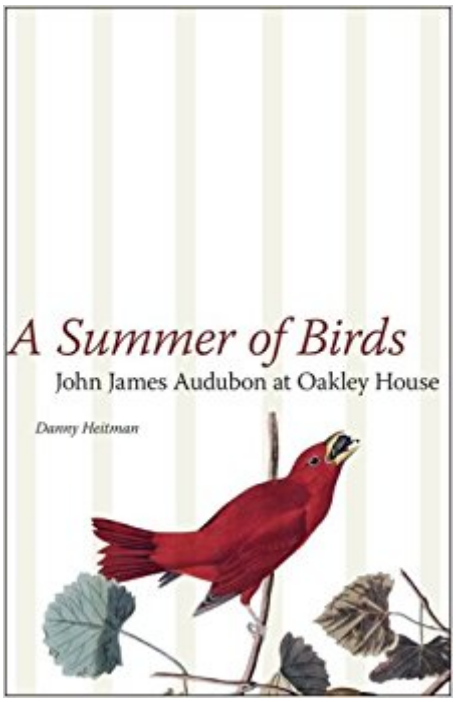
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A Summer Of Birds: John James Audubon At Oakley House (The Hill Collection: Holdings Of The LSU Libraries)



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Synopsis

As the summer of 1821 began, John James Audubon’s ambition to create a comprehensive pictorial record of American birds was still largely a dream. Then, out of economic necessity, Audubon came to Oakley Plantation, a sprawling estate in Louisiana’s West Feliciana Parish. Teeming with an abundance of birds, the woods of Oakley galvanized Audubon’s sense of possibility for one of the most audacious undertakings in the annals of art. In A Summer of Birds, journalist and essayist Danny Heitman sorts through the facts and romance of Audubon’s summer at Oakley, a season that clearly shaped the destiny of the world’s most famous bird artist. Heitman draws from a rich variety of sources -- including Audubon’s own extensive journals, more recent Audubon scholarship, and Robert Penn Warren’s poetry -- to create a stimulating excursion across time, linking the historical man Audubon to the present-day civic and cultural icon. He considers the financial straits that led to Audubon’s employment at Oakley as a private tutor to fifteen-year-old Eliza Pirrie, Audubon’s family history, his flamboyance as a master of self-invention, his naturalist and artistic techniques, and the possible reasons for his dismissal. Illustrations include photographs of Oakley House -- now a state historic site -- Audubon’s paintings from his Oakley period, and portraits of the Pirrie family members. A favorable combination of climate and geography made Oakley a birding haven, and Audubon completed or began at least twenty-three bird paintings -- among his finest work -- while staying there. A Summer of Birds will inform and delight readers in its exploration of this eventful but unsung 1821 interlude, a fascinating chapter in the life of America’s foremost bird artist. It is an indispensable pleasure for birders, Audubon enthusiasts, and visitors to Oakley House.

Book Information

Series: The Hill Collection: Holdings of the LSU Libraries
Hardcover: 144 pages
Publisher: LSU Press; First Printing edition (April 1, 2008)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0807133302
ISBN-13: 978-0807133309
Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.6 x 8.7 inches
Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews
Best Sellers Rank: #256,073 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #41 inÃ Â Books > Arts & Photography > Photography & Video > Architectural > Houses & Hotels #362 inÃ Â Books >

Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Animals > Birds & Birdwatching #428 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Artists, Architects & Photographers

Customer Reviews

"Heitman’s treatment of Audubon is one of the most sophisticated I’ve seen. He takes one episode from Audubon’s life--an important one--and unfolds from that the whole exciting panorama of Audubon’s life and art, a spectacular feat." -- Christoph Irmscher, editor of John James Audubon: Writings and Drawings "Danny Heitman has a wonderful eye for detail, an ear for life’s most resounding rhythms, and a heart ever open to understanding what makes us who we are. Across the years John James Audubon has found a friend in Mr. Heitman--a friend who tells this story beautifully." -- Bob Greene, National Public Radio Commentator and author of And You Know You Should Be Glad and Once Upon a Town"I have no doubt that D. H. Lawrence--passionate advocate for ’spirit of place’ in American literature--would have admired this book. Danny Heitman has entered a pivotal slice of John James Audubon’s life on the brink of Birds of America, taking the fortunate reader along and re-awakening a vision of forests and wildlife around Oakley House in the sultry summer of 1821. The result is richly satisfying and artful: local history as poetic metaphor." -- Neil Baldwin, author of Edison: Inventing the Century and The American Revelation: Ten Ideals That Shaped Our Country from the Puritans to the Cold War

Danny Heitman is an award-winning columnist for the The Advocate (Baton Rouge) and a member of the The Advocate’s editorial board. He has contributed essays to the Smithsonian, Christian Science Monitor, and other national publications and recently won the In Character prize for editorial and opinion writing.

Nicely written delineation of Audubon’s preparation of his great work. Expresses the family and financial problems involved.

Wonderful book with beautiful images and endpapers. It addresses a cryptic period in Audubon’s life when he was so poor he sought employment as a tutor to a 15 year old girl in a southern plantation owned by wealthy landowners. He was very productive and drew a few birds but on the whole it was a stressful time for him because the lady of the house did not care for him. He was fired and payment was withheld for a while, but an enduring mystery remains as to the reasons for his dismissal.Teresita Alicea

First, let me declare openly that I am a biased reviewer. I was a classmate of Danny Heitman (the author) in high school and learned to love his story-telling and writing skills many years ago. I follow Heitman's columns and essays with interest because he always finds a way to seize me.I knew that would the case with this book, and I was not disappointed. Although I am a native of Louisiana, I must confess that I've never examined the life of Audobon nor his oeuvre. Nor am I a birder. I am simply someone who loves history and stories. Heitman tells an interesting story, and tells it well. Using the nominally episodic setting of one summer in the forests of Oakley, Heitman weaves the story of Audobon's life, dreams, and ambitions, and you leave this book with a grasp of who Audobon really was. I may never read another book about Audobon, but I know him now.You'll find this a quick and satisfying read, by a writer who deserves the opportunity to tell us more interesting stories in the years to come.

What a refreshing and delightful read. Exquisitely detailed, I felt as if I were in the woods of St Francisville, Louisiana observing the birds myself.I love the way Heitman took liberty with the time line as he wove together past and future events in Audubon's life that supported the current points in each chapter. I also appreciated how adeptly he intertwined the account with modern metaphors --reading the book was like ascending that beautiful spiral staircase to the Oakley House gallery. This author has a gifted ability to observe and write that make this a delightful read, not only for the Audubon fan but for the general reader. Kudos! I do hope there are ideas for future books in development by this talented author.

Danny Heitman writes with keen observations on the beauty of nature, Audubon's sometimes contradictory motivations as man and artist and a page in Louisiana history as seen through his subject's eyes.The book is expertly written and rich in historical detail. Heitman's enthusiasm for his subject, and his love of his native Louisiana, is evident on every page.

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