

# Patrons and collectors

## Contributors of zoological subjects to the works of George Edwards (1694–1773)

Arthur MacGregor

*Through his lavishly illustrated and eminently accessible Natural History of Uncommon Birds (1743–51) and Gleanings of Natural History (1758–64), George Edwards became one of the most influential naturalists and illustrators of mid-eighteenth-century England. The specimens on which he relied – either alive, stuffed, or in spirits – were generally in the ownership of others and his practice of carefully acknowledging the source of each of his subjects sheds considerable light on the extent to which exotic birds and animals were to be found in the possession of a range of owners from wealthy grandees to humble citizens, as well as specialist traders who emerged to supply this growing market. Edwards’s texts are drawn upon here to chart the degree to which exotic species, alive or dead, had begun to penetrate households great and small by the mid 1700s, particularly in the London area; an online appendix lists and identifies those who supplied him with specimens.*

### George Edwards, naturalist and illustrator

Born at Stratford, then a hamlet of West Ham (Essex) on 3 April 1694 to comfortably-off parents of Welsh extraction, George Edwards (Fig. 1) seemed destined for a career in trade when he left Brentwood Grammar School and was apprenticed to a ‘Master of Writing and Accounts’, John Dod of Fenchurch Street in London.<sup>1</sup> Edwards describes his master as ‘an exceeding strict Christian of our established Church, and a finished Scholar in the Greek and Latin Languages, tho’ a Man in Trade’. The relationship seems to have been amicable enough, but it was rendered all the more valuable by a fortunate development:<sup>2</sup>

One Dr Nicholson, an eminent Physician, who lived in Covent Garden, happened to die, and he being a Relation of Mr Dod’s, his Books, which amounted to a great Bulk, were stowed in a spare Room adjacent to my Bed-Chamber in Mr Dod’s House, and I being fond of looking into Books, and having a free Access to them, spent my Evenings, and often the greatest Part of my Nights, in turning over these Books, and reading such Parts of them as best suited my Genius: This Practice I followed for two or three Years.

It seems to have been in these circumstances that Edwards’s passion for natural history was awakened. He returned home in 1716, later travelling (with little apparent sense of purpose and on a modest

budget) in the Netherlands, Scandinavia and France. Writing of his stay among the Norwegians he records that in 1718 ‘for the Space of about two Months I strolled up their Creeks and Rivers, and over their Rocks and Mountains’. On the return voyage to Bristol his ship found itself ‘wind-bound’ in the Isles of Scilly for a time where he was ‘much diverted . . . with Fishing, and observing the great Variety of Sea Fowl that frequented the Clefts of the Islands.’ A highlight of his time in France should have been a visit to the menagerie at Versailles, but at this period there was ‘no living Creature in it; the Court not residing there in the King’s Minority, they had been neglected and were all dead and dispersed, which was a Disappointment to me, because I always delighted in such Things.’ Such instruction as he had in natural history, therefore, seems to have been largely at his own initiative.

The early death of his father evidently relieved him of the urgent need for paid employment so that, in the words of his earliest biographer,<sup>3</sup> Edwards

. . . closely pursued his favourite study of natural history; applying himself to drawing and colouring such animals as fell under his notice. A strict attention to natural more than picturesque beauty claimed his earliest care. Birds first engaged his particular attention.

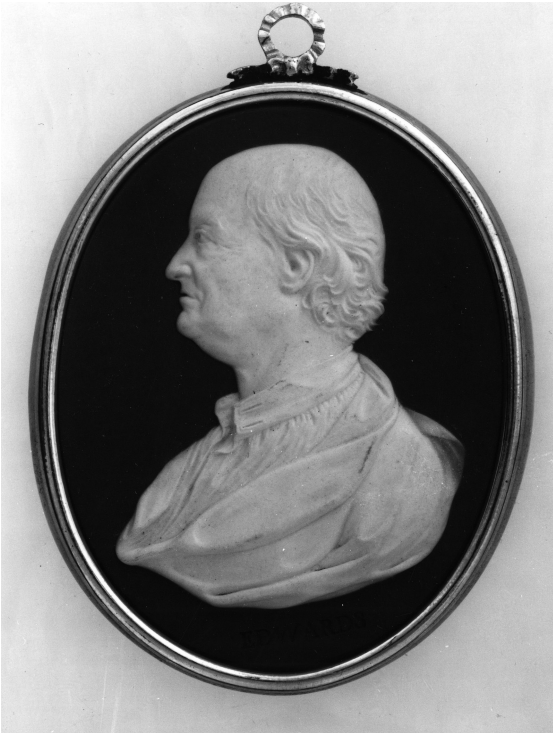


Fig. 1 George Edwards (1694–1773). Portrait medallion in jasper ware, modelled by Isaac Gosset, produced by Wedgwood & Bentley, c.1775–80. Length 91.5 mm. British Museum, P & E, 1887,0307,1.62. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

It has been observed<sup>4</sup> that while there was an abundance of natural resources in the Essex countryside, it was to the nearby Port of London, an inexhaustible source of exotic species, that Edwards's attention was particularly drawn. He records that 'what principally pleased me was Copying strictly after Nature' and in a little time he found himself 'performing something that was taken Notice of by the Curious, who promoted the Sale of what I then did, as well as employed me themselves'.<sup>5</sup> James Theobald, a timber-merchant and collector with premises in Lambeth (see online appendix), is singled out as having been particularly supportive, introducing him to like-minded naturalists; soon, 'by the Increase of my Friends, and better Encouragement, I something mended my Hand, and enlarged my Prices': his professional career had begun to take shape.

In time, Theobald introduced him to the circle of collectors and naturalists then centred on the Royal Society. Edwards was not at all complacent about

his skills, however, and remained eager to improve: in 1731 he undertook a further visit to Holland and Brabant, collecting prints and books that might prove 'suitable to my Turn of Studies' and examining in detail 'many fine Original Pictures of Flemish Masters at Antwerp, &c.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1733 Edwards was appointed bedell to the College of Physicians, a role that placed him in charge of the College's administration, library and collections. As well as providing a rent-free house on the premises, then in Warwick Lane near St Paul's, the appointment gave him unlimited access to one of the premier scientific libraries in London, allowing him conveniently to pursue his own interests while also carrying out his various duties.

As a draughtsman, Edwards's sole aim was, in his own words, to present 'a natural and accurate portrayal' of his subjects rather than a picturesque composition. He habitually made three or four drawings of each one, using 'as many different Turns and Attitudes' as he could invent in order to attain maximum verisimilitude.<sup>7</sup> These preliminary drawings might be in pencil, while his finished works were at first in pen and watercolour.<sup>8</sup> So pleasing and accurate did the naturalists find his representations that no less a figure than Linnaeus would be moved to write of them that 'nothing is wanting to the birds but their song'.<sup>9</sup> Edwards's personal philosophy is set out in the preface to the first volume of his major work, the *Natural History of Birds* (hereafter *Birds*), vol. 1, p. xiv:

In describing natural Things nothing ought to be omitted, that is any way remarkable, and may fix and establish the Character of the thing described, so as plainly to distinguish it from all other things: This may be done without following the minute Steps of some Authors, who have wrote large Books on single Birds or Plants, for long descriptions lead the Mind into Mazes and Confusion, and tire rather than instruct. On the other hand, too brief Descriptions should be avoided; for very often these are found to consist only of such general Forms and Colourings that are common to many things of the same Genus . . . which makes the Description uncertain, or rather no natural Description at all . . .

His seriousness of purpose is not to be doubted – nor his estimation of the importance of the draughtsman's role (*Birds* 1, p. xvi):

If Natural Historians, or they who draw for them, would carefully observe these rules, some of them might perhaps produce Figures that would be deemed perfect by the knowing Naturalists of these Times and escape their Censure;

then might they, like the celebrated Statues of the antient Greeks and Romans, pass down as Models to future Ages, as things justly and truly representing Nature; but these things are rather to be wished for than expected

Seldom having first-hand experience of the habitats from which his subjects were drawn, Edwards took ‘Counsel and Assistance of some Painters my particular Friends . . . to decorate the Birds with airy Grounds’; a mossy twig – often resembling a miniature tree – and some rather generalized vegetation served for most of the perching birds, for example (*Birds* 1, p. xvi). These conventions belie Edwards’s ambitions to be considered as a rounded naturalist rather than merely an illustrator: he was fully aware of the importance of recording such information on the geographical origins (if not the detailed habitat) of his specimens as could be acquired, being aware that where they came from was ‘very material in Natural History’. He also shows himself concerned with current debates on questions such as migration versus hibernation,<sup>10</sup> and seasonal plumage changes.

Edwards long harboured ambitions to publish his work but was daunted by the costs involved. This dilemma was resolved when, around 1739, he was taught the techniques of etching by the naturalist Mark Catesby,<sup>11</sup> so that he found himself at last in a position to capitalize further on his drawing skills by preparing his own images for the press – a stratagem that enabled him to exert personal control over every stage of the process.<sup>12</sup> He quickly discovered, however, that the hand-coloured etchings failed to live up to the standards of his originals; he then began composing the etchings as original compositions and as he became more confident would on occasion draw from nature directly on to the waxed copperplate.<sup>13</sup>

Edwards’s initial plan to produce a two-volume work illustrating 100 birds, most of them not previously described, was gradually modified as his ambitions grew. Ultimately, under the imprint of the College of Physicians, four volumes of *A Natural History of Birds* would appear in 1743, 1747, 1750 and 1751 respectively (with additional editions in French), in all of which the hand-coloured etchings (printed off by Edwards himself) were accompanied by extensive notes which form the basis of the discussion below.<sup>14</sup> Later he would extend the series under a new title, *Gleanings of Natural History* (hereafter *Gleanings*), with a parallel text (and a parallel title, *Glanures d’Histoire Naturelle*) in French, published in three volumes in 1758, 1760 and 1764

respectively.<sup>15</sup> Here the plates are numbered in a continuous sequence with those in *Birds*, so that the first illustration in *Gleanings* vol. 1 is numbered as pl. 211. As Mason observes, the strategy was a clever one, with owners of the first title being made to feel they should now invest in the second, and with new subscribers to *Gleanings* being encouraged to acquire also the *Birds* in order to complete retrospectively their new acquisitions.<sup>16</sup> The same author notes that Edwards took care to protect his copyright by reference to the recently enacted legislation of 1735;<sup>17</sup> hence many of the images bear copyright dates which are earlier than the publication date of the relevant book.

With the appearance of the first volume of *Birds*, Edwards was immediately nominated for Fellowship of the Royal Society as ‘a gentleman well acquainted with natural history’, a considerable honour which he modestly declined (ultimately he would be elected in 1757); the third volume won him the Society’s prestigious Copley Medal. Edwards had already become a regular contributor at meetings of the Society, making some ten presentations of which four were printed in the *Philosophical Transactions*.<sup>18</sup>

With a growing international reputation, Edwards now found himself in regular contact with a number of well-placed naturalists: Peter Collinson, a Quaker cloth merchant with business interests in America, proved a fruitful contact and William Bartram (son of John Bartram) in Philadelphia sent a regular supply of specimens. From Collinson and others came commissions to draw animals and birds, and in return he (like a number of other patrons) was, in Edwards’s words, ‘on occasions willing to oblige me with the use of every new subject he receives from foreign countries’. Every opportunity was taken to make duplicate drawings for his own purposes.<sup>19</sup>

Later in life, in 1760, Edwards sold his stock of drawings to the Marquess of Bute,<sup>20</sup> while the unsold remainder of his books went to James Robson, a bookseller of New Bond Street.<sup>21</sup> Both the British Museum (Department of Prints and Drawings) and the British Library (Department of Manuscripts) currently hold collections of original drawings, some of them copiously annotated by the author and many forming the originals from which the plates discussed below were produced.<sup>22</sup> Edwards eventually retired to a house in Plaistow where, after a long decline, he died on 23 July 1773 and was buried in West Ham churchyard.

## Edwards's patrons

In his *Gleanings of Natural History* (vol. II, pp. ii–vi), Edwards makes the following unequivocal declaration:

During the time of the publication of my *History of Birds*, I had the great honour, happiness, and pleasure of being patronized by four gentlemen, who were, perhaps, the greatest promoters of learning, science, and arts, of any in the present age.

The first of these is identified as ‘the late Most Noble Duke of Richmond’, who, ‘though, by his offices, his time was taken up by the important affairs of the public, yet his doors were always open to men of learning, science, and ingenuity.’ Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond, Lennox and Aubigny (1701–50), an energetic and successful courtier, maintained a fine house in Whitehall as well as a seat at Goodwood (Hampshire), the first with an extensive aviary and the second with a remarkable menagerie.<sup>23</sup> The inhabitants of the menagerie, collected from ‘all parts of the world’ from 1725 onwards, were kept in dens with iron-barred gates;<sup>24</sup> at one time they were listed as comprising five wolves, two tigers plus a ‘woman tyger’, a lion, two leopards, a civet, a ‘tyger cat’, three bears, three raccoons, three foxes, a jackal, an armadillo, a peccary, four monkeys, two ‘Greenland dogs’, three vultures, two eagles, a kite, two owls, and seven cassowaries. So accessible and so popular did it become that in 1730 the Duke’s steward had occasion to complain that ‘we are very much troubled with Rude Company to see ye animals. Sunday last we had 4 or 5 hundred good and bad’.<sup>25</sup> Selected dead specimens from both the menagerie and the aviary might be stuffed for inclusion in the Duke’s cabinet of rarities.<sup>26</sup>

Second in Edwards’s list of benefactors is Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753). By the time they encountered each other Sloane was already at the height of his fame – president of the College of Physicians (from 1716) and of the Royal Society (from 1727), Physician in Ordinary to George II and since his return from Jamaica in 1689 the owner of a collection of ever-increasing importance, housed at first in Bloomsbury and, from 1742, in the manor house at Chelsea (seemingly indicated respectively by ‘in London’ and ‘in Chelsea’, in the online appendix). Sloane would continue to expand the collection in every department – and to make it freely available to the curious – until the later years of his life, before it was offered for sale at his death to Parliament, under such terms

as ultimately would bring about the founding of the British Museum.<sup>27</sup> Edwards records that Sloane ‘employed me, for a great number of years, in drawing miniature figures of animals, &c. after nature, in water-colours to encrease his very great collection of fine drawings by other hands’ (*Gleanings*, vol. II, p. iii). Mason estimates that of those drawings by Edwards in the Sloane collection that are dated, the earliest is from 1732 while the majority are from 1740 to 1742.<sup>28</sup> In Sloane’s later years Edwards records that he ‘would visit him every week to divert him, for an hour or two, with the common news of the town, and with any thing particular that should happen amongst his acquaintance of the Royal Society, and other ingenious Gentlemen, many of whom I was weekly conversant with’; he visited Sloane on the day he died. In addition to his museum collection, Sloane kept a number of live specimens for which Edwards is perhaps the single most important source of information.

The third of Edwards’s great patrons was Dr Richard Mead, Physician in Ordinary to the King: ‘His personal service, his ample fortune, his house, and every thing in his power, always contributed, in the most extensive manner, to the promotion of learning, science, arts, mechanics, and, in short, every thing that tended to the public benefit . . . In Dr Mead I had a whole family of patrons: his son, and two of the King’s Physicians in Ordinary, whose Ladies were daughters to Dr Mead, and Mr Mead his brother, are all my very good friends and promoters.’ Mead was the owner of a museum more restricted in scale and diversity than that of Sloane, but was esteemed by many of their contemporaries as more refined in his connoisseurship. Mead had already helped fund production of a book of illustrations of natural history subjects by Eleazar Albin.<sup>29</sup>

The fourth major name is one that features less frequently in the history of natural history: Martin Folkes, president of the Royal Society following Sloane and president too of the Society of Antiquaries. Folkes was a pioneering numismatist rather than a naturalist and he makes no further appearance in the volumes in question.

Apart from these names singled out for special mention, many others are acknowledged in Edwards’s texts (and here in the online appendix), their names reading like an index of the foremost contemporary naturalists: they include Patrick Browne, Mark Catesby, Peter Collinson, Joseph Dandridge, John

Fothergill, Cromwell Mortimer, and the Duchess of Portland.

### Sites and sources of specimens listed in Edwards's works

The principal aim of this essay is to characterize the landscape of collectors, dealers, and entrepreneurs of various sorts who were able to supply Edwards with the impressive array of exotic species that fills his works. It may be stressed that none of these rarities was observed in its native habitat and that Edwards rarely travelled far beyond the environs of London in order to record them.<sup>30</sup> None the less, it is a striking feature of many of his descriptions that they conclude with some version of the formula 'so far as I know, not yet figured or described by any author': clearly there were important contributions to be made to the advancement of knowledge in the mid-eighteenth century without the need to leave home. Inevitably, Edwards was reliant on owners for such details of provenance and habitat as might be recorded, which in some cases was none at all; such information as was available to him is nevertheless carefully recorded and evidently was seen as complementing the usefulness of the illustrations.

The ships of the East India Company arriving in London were a particularly rich source. Charles Dubois, secretary of the Company, was one of those instrumental in channeling specimens to collectors such as Sloane and Mead (the latter was said to have acquired 'a large cargo of natural rarities' by this route) and ultimately to Edwards. In fact, everyone from masters to ordinary seamen busied themselves with private enterprise of this kind: Captain Isaac Worth, master of the *Houghton* in the service of the Company, was a valued supplier to Edwards, as was his first mate, Mr May. A less direct route was taken by the 'Red-breasted Parrakeet' (*Gleanings*, vol. I, pl. 232), whose stuffed skin, 'pretty well preserved, and now in my hands, was bought at a China Warehouse in London, the master of which told me, that it was brought over in one of our East-India ships.' As a result of these contacts, formal and informal, London was well supplied with exotic pets: considerable aviaries were established by Lord Burlington at Chiswick House, by the Duke of Richmond at Whitehall, by the Duke of Montague at Blackheath, and by Sir Charles Wager at Parson's Green. Not all the specimens

reaching England were purely decorative: one city apothecary asked Edwards to draw the mongoose which he kept to rid his house of rats.

Neither were these imported species limited to animals and birds: butterflies and moths from China, serving as incidental ornaments to the principal illustrations, were provided by Captain Worth (who gave Edwards a whole box of insects from that country), by Robert Nesbitt and by Matthew Harrison; other insects from the East Indies came from Dr Matthew Lee and from Joseph Dandridge. From the West Indies specimens were contributed by Peter Collinson, William Goupy, John Gwilt and Mr Pope, the latter described as an inventor living in Ratcliff, between Shadwell and Limehouse; and from the American mainland from Richard Middleton Massey, Mark Catesby and Henry Baker. Occasionally specimens would arrive in more incidental fashion: Massey provided a scarlet locust, which 'came accidentally alive from the West Indies in a Basket of Pine-Apples', while various beetles were 'found by a Cooper in London, on his cleaving a piece of Virginia oak for pipe-staves' and others were recovered from hardwood imported from New England and in mahogany from an unrecorded source. Most unexpected is the presence of the 'Great Brown Locust' (*Birds*, vol. IV, pl. 208): 'On the fourth Day of August, 1748, vast Numbers of the great brownish spotted Locusts settled in all Parts of the City of London, and in most Parts of the Kingdom of England; which much surprized the Inhabitants.'

Perhaps the most considerable trade developed in birds, dead as well as live, many of them originating in South America – particularly in Surinam – which fed the London market via the Netherlands. Difficulties in attributing reliable provenances to some of these birds arose from time to time, as Edwards was all too aware (*Birds*, vol. II, p. 111):

Many African Birds have got the name of Americans amongst us, because they generally come to us from the West Indies; they being first brought thither from Africa in Ships, who trade in Negroe Slaves, and presented by Captains to Governors and Planters in America, from whom they are often sent into England as presents to the Nobility, and our London Merchants, without mentioning their being Natives of Africa, by which Mistake many Birds are asserted to be Natives of Countries where they were not bred.

Edwards was able to explain a number of earlier misidentifications by reference to this process. The

success of this exchange is attested by the disproportionate numbers of birds from Surinam which feature in Edwards's drawings.<sup>31</sup> Merchants trading with the West Indies were also major contributors, as were personnel of the Hudson's Bay Company (notably James Isham and Alexander Light) and of the East India Company (particularly Captain Worth). The lack of detailed records surviving today tends to conceal the considerable volume of animals and birds being shipped in this way: quoting a description of the porcupine, as communicated from Albany (New York) by Light on 10 August 1742, Edwards relays the information that 'Since our conquest of America, many have been brought alive to England'.<sup>32</sup> Otherwise merchants involved in international trade (particularly with Lisbon, which evidently played a major part in the supply-chain) were liberal donors; diplomats (notably John Gideon Loten, formerly Governor of Ceylon) were also generous, as were foreign residents like Dr Alexander Russell in Aleppo, and naval commanders, among whom Sir Charles Wager stands out.

Shops selling live specimens had also made an appearance by this time: Edwards bought a number of varieties of parrot at Bartholomew Fair,<sup>33</sup> at a shop called the Parrot and Cage, and from a public house in the Strand whose landlord operated a trade in exotic species. Edwards's own Little Green Parrot was acquired 'out of a Dealer's Hands', though (perhaps typically) the latter had no idea where it came from (*Birds*, vol. iv, pl. 168). Otherwise, opportunities were taken to make records wherever specimens presented themselves, as with the Crested or Coped Black Vulture (*Gleanings*, vol. II, pl. 290): 'The Vulture was shewn in London (1757) amongst other Birds and Beasts of Prey . . . its keeper . . . said it was brought from the Deserts of Arabia: but there is no depending on their words . . . I think I saw one of this species two or three years since at the Duke of Cumberland's in Windsor-park.' Similarly, for his account of the Little Indian Buffalo (*Birds*, vol. iv, pl. 200), Edwards relied for first-hand experience on a specimen 'kept some Time Grazing in the Artillery-Ground, London', combining his own observations with 'a Picture after Nature of the same Animal, which agreed exactly with it, in the House of Sir Hans Sloane, at Chelsea'.

Live specimens naturally presented the most desirable subjects, and many of Edwards's most characterful images are noteworthy for the vivacity with which the birds in particular are portrayed. Some of these

were owned in ones and twos, while others formed part of considerable aviaries and menageries, notably that of the Duke of Richmond. It was already becoming apparent, however, that there were 'many rare and tender Birds, which will not bear Sea-Voyages, brought various Ways, preserved, to satisfy the Curiosity of these Times', and quite often Edwards had to make do with dead specimens, whose appearance he 'conjectured into live poses' (Fig. 2). Many North American birds were presented to him dried, while specimens already stuffed and mounted were to be found in a variety of coffee shops and public houses, as listed in the online appendix, as well as in private houses.

Occasional records appear of other kinds of encounters: of the bustard, for example, Edwards

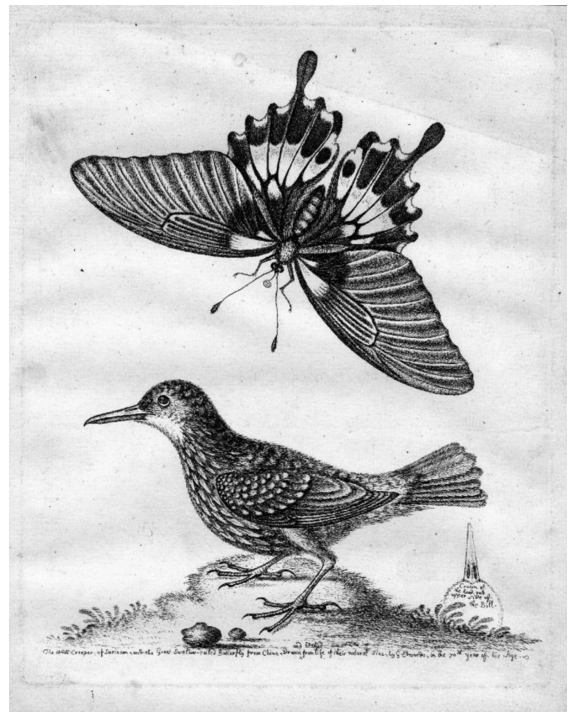


Fig. 2. The *Wall-creeper* of Surinam and the *Great Swallow-tailed butterfly* from China, 'drawn and etched from life of their natural size, by George Edwards, in the 70th year of his Age'. 235 mm by 188 mm. Reproduced in *Gleanings of Natural History*, vol. III, pl. 346. The wall creeper, from the collection of John Fothergill, was one of many specimens that reached Edwards preserved in spirits, to be 'conjectured into live poses'; the 'curious fly' came from 'the polite and obliging Matthew Harrison, Esq., son of Sir Thomas Harrison, Chamberlain of London'. British Museum, P & D, 1861,1012.2379. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

writes (*Birds*, vol. II, pl. 74) that ‘I dined upon the Hen Bird here described with the late Dr James Douglas, for whom I procured it, and found it, the Breast in Particular, to be short and very tender Meat, of an agreeable high Relish.’ Similarly, his account of the knot (*Gleanings*, vol. II, pl. 276) is annotated ‘This Bird I found in the London markets in a very hard frosty winter, I believe in 1739 or 1740.’

From time to time, particularly when he was vexed by questions of colouring (all too fugitive after death), wet specimens preserved in spirits of wine might provide the most accurate records. Two or more specimens preserved by different methods might yield a convincing composite picture, as in the case of the Little Ant-eater (*Gleanings*, vol. I, pl. 220): ‘By the help of these two [one specimen in spirits, one stuffed], a more perfect figure, &c, is here given, than could have been done from either of them alone; the first being only a skin, and the other closely sealed up in spirits of wine, which I was not permitted to open.’ This would have been a source of frustration to him as the preface to *Birds* (vol. I, p. xix) reveals his preferred working method:

Great part of the Birds, described in this Work, were living when I drew them; others were in Cases well preserved and dry, and some were kept in Spirits, which is the better way to preserve them, tho’ they cannot be so well drawn in Spirits, by reason the Forms of the Glasses alter the apparent Shapes of the Birds; therefore I took such Birds out of the Spirits.

Later in the same volume (*Birds*, vol. I, pl. 9) he adds:

If any one would draw a Bird preserv’d in Spirits, let him take it out, wash it pretty well in warm water, and rinse it in a good Quantity of cold, and let it dry gradually, and he will restore the true Colour of the Feathers, as far as can be.

As a last resort, Edwards occasionally made use of drawings compiled by others from live birds in order to supply information he was unable to recover from the specimen at hand. Writing of the Great White Owl, for example, he records (*Birds*, vol. II, pl. 61) that:

There is in the Hands of Mr Peter Colinson . . . an Oyl Painting of the Size of Life, done in Pensylvania by Order of – Penn, Esq. from one of these Birds taken alive, and kept for some Time, which has given me a Knowledge of the Colour of its Eyes. I find Drawings of this Bird also in the Collection of Sir Hans Sloane, in which the Colour of the Eyes agree with those of Mr Colinson’s Picture, which seems to me a reasonable Proof, that they are as I have expressed them.

The collections of bird paintings owned by Gideon Loten also served Edwards in this manner. He was by no means easily persuaded by inferior drawings and was wont to ignore them in deciding whether a specimen had previously been described. He sets out his criteria at the opening of his text (*Birds*, vol. I, p. xvi): ‘There are indeed some few which have been described but not figured, and some that have been very ill figured and described before; but I have not drawn or described any thing that was done before in any tolerable degree of Perfection.’ Eleazar Albin, whose own *Natural History of Birds* had appeared in 1731–38 and who worked closely with Joseph Dandridge, most regularly attracts Edwards’s disapproval.<sup>34</sup>

These many collaborations, resulted in a considerable archive of material, which would form the basis of Edwards’s published works. In the space of twenty-five years, in his own words (*Gleanings*, vol. II, p. 124): . . . by corresponding with Friends, settled in, or trading to every Quarter of the World (at the Expence of no small Part of my slender Fortune) [I] procured more Natural Curiosities than I could possibly have done by my own single travelling into any particular Parts. I have now by me, I believe, more original Drawings of Birds from Nature, directly drawn by my own Hand, than any other Person in England has of their own performing. . . I have about 500 particular and distinct Species of Birds and upwards of 100 other natural subjects.

The variety of means by which the specimens listed came into Edwards’s hands inevitably resulted in their exhibiting collectively a somewhat random character, with little or no evidence of deliberate selection on the basis of species or of geographical origin. It seems reasonable to conclude that an alternative set of friends and acquaintances would have led seamlessly to a spectrum of choices different in character but no more meaningful than that with which we are presented. Notwithstanding his eagerness for verisimilitude, combined with the recording of such data as could be retrieved on matters of provenance, Edwards’s subjects remain ‘Natural Curiosities’, with particular emphasis given to the rare and the exotic, even if lesser-known English species were also admitted.

In keeping with the stated aims of this paper, only specimens that might be seen at a particular locality or in a named household appear in the online appendix.<sup>35</sup> Edwards is generally assiduous in making these records, although occasionally he was defeated, as with his account of the Large Green and Spotted Lizard (*Birds*, vol. IV, pl. 202): ‘I met with it alive, in the Possession of a

Person whose Name I have forgot, who staid in London only for a little while, but gave me Liberty to make a Draught of it, and told me it was brought from Jamaica.’

### A note on Edwards’s nomenclature

The systematic naming of species remained in a state of flux when Edwards published his descriptions: Linnaeus had first published his *Systema Naturae* only in 1735 and it would pass through numerous editions with many amendments before the tenth edition would appear in 1758 – the source taken to represent the starting point from which present-day nomenclature has evolved. By this time all of Edwards’s volumes were already in print, so that the names he applies to his specimens are liable to be quite different from those used today – quite apart from any misidentifications he may have applied. In 1776 Linnaeus himself published a list of the *Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Insects, Plants, &c contained in Edwards’s Natural History*,<sup>36</sup> which might have been expected to settle matters, but even this is now judged inaccurate (and it is also incomplete). The accurate naming of species is clearly a matter of the first importance to the scientific world, but it is an area beyond the competence of the present writer. Since the primary aim here is to survey the collectors and suppliers from whom Edwards gathered the specimens he illustrated (and the mechanisms by which they had reached those sources) rather than the birds and animals themselves, I have been content to rely on the names given in his text rather than risk adding to the confusion by conjectures of my own.

### Supplementary information

The bulk of this essay is presented in the form of a gazetteer, giving the names of owners of specimens and the location of their respective collections, contained in an online appendix at <http://jhc.oxfordjournals.org/>.

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### Notes and references

- 1 The outlines of Edwards’s early life are recorded in his own *Natural History of Uncommon Birds, and of some other Rare and Undescribed Animals*, otherwise titled *A Natural History of Birds* (London, 1743–51) and cited hereafter as *Birds*, vol. II, pp. 121–4; by J. Robson, *Some Memoirs of the Life and Works of George Edwards* (London, 1776); and, more recently by A. Stuart Mason, *George Edwards. The Bedell and his Birds* (London, 1992) and idem, ‘Edwards, George (1694–1773)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 17, pp. 923–5.
- 2 *Birds*, vol. II, p. 121.
- 3 Robson, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 6–7.
- 4 Mason, op. cit. [1992] (note 1), p. 4.
- 5 *Birds*, vol. II, p. 123.
- 6 *Ibid.*, vol. I.
- 7 Edwards, *Birds* I: preface. Mason, op. cit. [1992] (note 1), p. 6, comments on the painstaking and uninspired quality of many of the preliminary pencil drawings that survive in the library of the Zoological Society of London, and indeed despite the high estimation in which his finished drawings were held by contemporaries they are today generally deemed more praiseworthy for their documentary value than for aesthetic accomplishment: for example, Victoria Dickensen, *Drawn from Life: Science and Art in the Portrayal of the New World* (Toronto etc., 1998), pp. 3–4, judges Edwards’s ‘ill-proportioned nighthawks . . . peculiar ducks [and] strange flycatchers . . . stilted, even inept’.
- 8 He also claimed to have invented two forms of representation – one for winged insects, in which he would paint the body and the legs before gumming on the actual wings of the insect, and the other involving gumming individual feathers of birds into place on a drawn representation. *Birds*, vol. II, p. 119.
- 9 Linnaeus to George Edwards, 13 April 1764: ‘Gratulor Tibi de tot pulchris, tamque, infinitis Avibus rarissimis, quot nullumquam detexit nec unquam defecat, minus unquam tam vivide delineabit in quibus nil deficit nisi Cantus’. British Library Add. MS 28539, fols 176v–177r; translated in Sir J. E. Smith, *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus, and other Naturalists* (London, 1821), vol. II, pp. 502–3. Elaine Charwat kindly located these references for me.
- 10 For example, Edwards’s account of the ‘Greatest Martin or Swift’ (*Birds*, vol. I, pl. 27), described from a specimen sent from Gibraltar and given to him by Mark Catesby, concludes with the observation that: ‘Gibraltar being so near to Africa, ’tis probable the Birds of Passage may pass in Flocks from Europe to Barbary, and from thence to Europe at certain Seasons.’
- 11 Catesby had been trained in etching by Joseph Goupy, a Frenchman resident in London, and now passed on his knowledge to Edwards: ‘my good Friend Mr Catesby put me on etching my Plates myself, as he had done in his Works; and not



- only so, but invited me to see him work at Etching, and gave me all the necessary Hints and Instructions to proceed' (*Birds*, vol. 1, p. xvii). Mason, op. cit. [1992] (note 1), p. 14, reproduces the earliest known uncoloured etching (now in the Linnean Society) by Edwards's hand, which bears the date 1739. See also online appendix.
- 12 The prowess Edwards developed as a printmaker is suggested by the partnership he formed with Matthias [or Matthew] Darly (c.1720–80), a designer and printseller with premises in Northumberland Court, off the Strand: Darly had taken over the lease from Thomas Chippendale, for whose *Gentleman's and Cabinet-Maker's Director* (1754) he engraved most of the plates. Edwards and Darly collaborated on the production of their own *New Book of Chinese Designs*, published jointly in the same year. Three years later Edwards and Darly took a shop opposite the nearby Hungerford Market, which they named the Golden Acorn (Timothy Clayton, 'Darly, Matthias (c.1720–1780)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 15, pp. 160–1. See also British Museum collection database: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx?people=126170&peoA=126170-2-60](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx?people=126170&peoA=126170-2-60). I am grateful to Felicity Roberts, who kindly drew my attention to this aspect of Edwards's oeuvre.
  - 13 This was a stratagem adopted when speed was of the essence (as when specimens were decaying before his eyes): see references in the online appendix.
  - 14 Vol. 1 was more extensively titled *A Natural History of Uncommon Birds, and of some other Rare and Undescribed Animals*; the shorter version was adopted for the later three volumes. Edwards himself hand-coloured at least a dozen copies and supervised the colouring of the remainder by assistants (Mason, op. cit. [1992] (note 1), p. 14). Edwards deposited one set of etchings at the College of Physicians, 'carefully and exactly coloured from the original drawings which may serve as a standard to refer to . . . in case the Plates should outlive me'.
  - 15 George Edwards, *Gleanings of Natural History / Glanures d'Histoire Naturelle* (London, 1758–64), cited hereafter as *Gleanings*.
  - 16 The essay sections from these volumes were later reprinted by Edwards as *Essays upon Natural History* (London, 1770).
  - 17 This was the 'Act for the encouragement of the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints, by vesting the properties thereof in the inventors and engravers, during the time therein mentioned', 8 Geo. II, c.13.
  - 18 These were conveniently collected and reprinted as an addendum to the *Memoirs* of Edwards published by Robson, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 27–38. At the first of these occasions he exhibited a preserved specimen of the Great White Owl from Hudson's Bay, 'designed for the museum of the Society'.
  - 19 Edwards wrote (*Birds* 1, p. xvi) that for twenty years 'I have been for a good part of the Time employ'd by many curious Gentlemen in London to draw such rare foreign Birds as they were possess'd of, and never neglected to take Draughts of them with their Permission, for my own Collection.'
  - 20 Dedicattee of vol. II of *Gleanings*. Reputedly the Marquess had in mind to make a gift of Edwards's drawings to the King, but since Bute's friendship with the then Prince of Wales did not survive the latter's accession as George III, his intentions were never realized.
  - 21 Robson, op. cit. (note 1), p. 21.
  - 22 See especially British Museum, P&D Sloane 5261; British Library, Add. MSS 5263–5, 5267, 5271–2.
  - 23 Within a shrubbery at Goodwood the Duchess of Richmond and her daughters also formed a much-admired grotto 15½ feet long, decorated with shells in patterns 'forming vases and cornucopias of flowers' and with a floor paved with marble and horses' teeth. The whole project took them seven years to complete: see Earl of March, *A Duke and his Friends. The Life and Letters of the Second Duke of Richmond* (London, 1911), pp. 138–9.
  - 24 J. Kent, *Records and Reminiscences of Goodwood and the Dukes of Richmond* (London, 1896), p. 8; see also M. M. Reese, *Goodwood's Oak. The Life and Times of the Third Duke of Richmond, Lennox and Aubigny* (London, 1987).
  - 25 See Earl of March, op. cit. (note 23), vol. II, p. 630n; T. J. McCann, *The Correspondence of the Dukes of Richmond and Newcastle 1724–1750*, Sussex Record Society. 73 (Lewes, 1984), p. xxix.
  - 26 Perhaps the best-known specimen in the menagerie at Goodwood was associated with Charles Lennox's successor, the 3rd Duke of Richmond (and hence arrived too late to make an appearance in Edwards's volumes): this was the first bull moose to be imported from Canada to Britain, famously recorded by George Stubbs: see W. D. Ian Rolfe, 'A George Stubbs drawing recognised', *Burlington Magazine* 125 (1983), pp. 738–41; idem, 'William Hunter (1718 – 1783) on Irish "elk" and Stubbs's *Moose*', *Archives of Natural History* 11 (1983), pp. 263–90; Judy Egerton, *George Stubbs, Painter* (New Haven and London, 2007), no. 106.
  - 27 See the various essays in A. MacGregor (ed.), *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary; Founding Father of the British Museum* (London, 1994) and A. Walker, A. MacGregor and M. Hunter (eds), *From Books to Bezoars. Sir Hans Sloane and his Collections* (London, 2012), with further bibliography.
  - 28 Mason, op. cit. [1992] (note 1), p. 5.
  - 29 For Albin and other artists contemporary with Edwards see C. E. Jackson, *Bird Etchings. The Illustrators and their Books, 1655 – 1855* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1985).
  - 30 A rare glimpse of such an outing appears in *Gleanings* III, pl. 358, where he describes an outing to the Isle of Wight and a very affecting visit to The Needles in order to see puffins and razor-bills in their natural habitat. Perhaps it was on this same expedition that he encountered the Blue-headed Parrot (*Gleanings* III, pl. 314): 'This very beautiful and rare Parrot I discovered hanging in a cage at the door of Mr Haswell, Merchant, on the Point, at Portsmouth, May 1761; who, though I was a stranger, kindly accommodated me with a room in his house to take a sketch, and memorandums to finish my drawing.'
  - 31 Edwards also had access to Sloane's drawings of surinamese birds by Maria Sybilla Merian.
  - 32 Edwards, op. cit. (note 15) pp.176–7. Light is described elsewhere (*Birds* 1, pl. 46) as 'a curious Person, now residing in Hudson's Bay whither he was sent by the Hudson's Bay Company.'
  - 33 H. Morley, *Memoirs of Bartholomew Fair*, 4th edn (London, 1892), pp. 302, 376, mentions that there was there in Queen Anne's day 'a Collection of Strange and Wonderful Creatures displayed . . . at the Booth near the Hospital Gate', including 'the Noble Casheware . . . a Leopard from Lebanon; an Eagle from Russia; a Posowm from Hispaniola', together with a scattering of dancing bears and dogs, camels, elephants, learned cats and rattlesnakes.
  - 34 In *Birds*, vol. IV, pp. 212–17 Edwards provides his own 'Brief and General Idea of Drawing, and Painting in Water-Colours: intended for the Amusement of the Curious, rather than the Instruction of Artists' and, on pp. 230–35 'Some brief Instructions for Etching or Engraving on Copper-Plates, with Aqua Fortis'.

35 Having contemplated the possibility of plotting the sites in London from which Edwards's specimens were drawn on to a contemporary map (such as John Rocque's 'Map of London and the adjacent country 10 miles round' of 1748), I came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to reconcile the uneven distribution of the sources – with pockets of narrowly identifiable addresses within the streets of the City and in Westminster, with lesser numbers drawn more broadly from the boroughs of Southwark, Chiswick and Rotherhithe, and

with outliers in rural Essex and Surrey – to a single coherent chart. The value of producing multiple maps seemed equally doubtful, so the reader is presented in the appendix with no more than the narrative descriptions taken from Edwards's own texts.

36 Carolus Linnaeus, *Of the Birds, Beasts, Fishes, Insects, Plants, &c contained in Edwards's Natural History, in Seven Volumes* (London, 1776). The publisher was Edwards's friend, the bookseller James Robson.