

The Radcliffe Collection of coloured drawings of birds from the Amsterdam cabinet of Joan Raye (1737–1823) with annotations by François Levaillant (1753–1824)

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ABSTRACT: In 1826, the University of Oxford purchased a collection of 930 watercolour drawings of birds bound in 12 volumes. They had been obtained by the bookseller Joseph Harding (1783–1843) of London at an auction of the effects of Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard (1737–1823) in Amsterdam in 1824 or 1825. Here called the ‘Radcliffe Collection’, these drawings have a close connection with the French ornithologist François Levaillant (1753–1824), well-known for his travels to South Africa (1780–1784) and for his authorship of five splendidly-illustrated ornithological works. The history and contents of this collection are described. Of the 752 birds depicted, 420 species also feature in the auction catalogue of Raye’s cabinet dated 1827. About half of the drawings in the Radcliffe Collection depict species described and figured on the engraved plates in Levaillant’s published works. The drawings often include two captions in French, one probably written by Levaillant, the second possibly by Joan Raye or his curator. None of the drawings was signed by an artist. They depict many type specimens of species first described by Levaillant, which were given binomial names by others in the early nineteenth century. They provide a rare glimpse into private cabinets of natural history at a time when many new species of birds were brought to Europe from across the world.

KEYWORDS: bird illustrations – cabinets of natural history – François Levaillant – nomenclature – Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard – Radcliffe Collection.

Among the papers assembled by the ornithologist and palaeontologist Hugh Edwin Strickland (1811–1853) and preserved in the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, there is a ‘Slip Catalogue’ consisting of miscellaneous notes on birds (Rookmaaker 2010: 13).¹ It contains an entry about the existence of a set of volumes of drawings connected with the work of the French traveller and ornithologist François Levaillant (1753–1824). These volumes had escaped notice, despite the continued interest in the works of Levaillant (Winterbottom 1973; Rookmaaker 1989; Rookmaaker *et al.* 2004; Glenn 2018). The volumes are hereafter termed the ‘Radcliffe Collection’ in recognition of funds provided by the Radcliffe Trust that enabled their acquisition by the Radcliffe Science Library in Oxford. They are now preserved by the University of Oxford in the Bodleian Library.

The Radcliffe Collection comprises 12 volumes that contain a total of 930 watercolour drawings of birds, mostly annotated in manuscript with their vernacular names and localities. Each of these volumes includes a title page stating their connection with the cabinet of Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard (1737–1823), a rich gentleman in Amsterdam; that the drawings they contain were drawn ‘from life’; and that Levaillant provided descriptions of them. Levaillant is well known as the author of two travel narratives about his expeditions in South Africa in

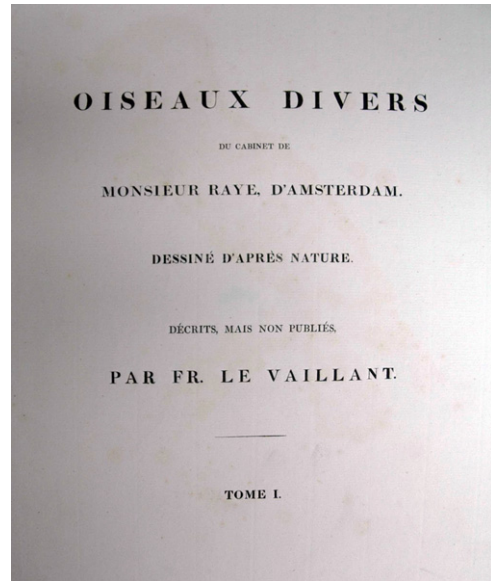
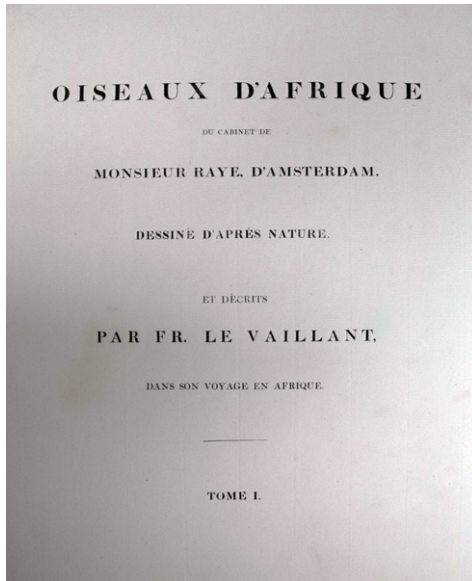


Figure 1 (*left*). Title page of Volume 1 of the Radcliffe Collection ‘Oiseaux d’Afrique’ (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.16). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.

Figure 2 (*right*). Title page of Volume 1 of the Radcliffe Collection ‘Oiseaux Divers’ (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.

1780–1784 (Levaillant 1790, 1795) and of five illustrated books on birds from various parts of the world (as listed in the References), published in separate series of instalments between 1796 and 1818.

The watercolours in the Radcliffe Collection show many bird species that are also found in the books by Levaillant. The information on the title pages of the two series of drawings in this collection – stating that they were ‘oiseaux ... du cabinet [birds from the cabinet]’ of Raye – is ambiguous (Figures 1 and 2), as its wording could imply either that the set of drawings was obtained from Raye’s collections, or that the drawings showed birds present in Raye’s cabinet. In view of this uncertainty, we compare the species found on the drawings with those listed in the sale catalogue of the specimens in the cabinet. We describe the history and contents of the Radcliffe Collection, in order to establish how the drawings relate to the specimens in Raye’s cabinet and to Levaillant’s works. Since there is little documentation pertaining to Raye, the evidence is largely limited to documents produced after his death. This paper is part of a continuing project to describe the brilliantly-coloured drawings in detail and compare them with other drawings, engraved plates and bibliographic references connected with the work of Levaillant. All translations from Dutch or French are by the authors. Several of the drawings are reproduced here, showing the great diversity of these historically important representations of birds in collections of the eighteenth century.

HISTORY OF THE RADCLIFFE COLLECTION IN OXFORD

The Radcliffe Collection was obtained by the Radcliffe Trust for its library (originally housed in the Radcliffe Camera, Oxford) in 1826. The volumes were divided in two sets, the first

consisting of four volumes of African birds (308 drawings), the second of eight volumes of 'Diverse' birds (622 drawings).² They were acquired together with a set of 2,578 drawings of shells bound in ten volumes, which has not been examined in the course of the present investigation, but shares the same origin.³

The drawings were offered for sale to the Trustees of the charitable bequest of John Radcliffe (1652–1714) at the University of Oxford, as recorded in their minutes:⁴

5th May 1826 – Read the letter from Dr. Williams to Lord Sidmouth dated 19 March 1826 proposing the purchase of two collections of drawings for the Radcliffe Library, one consisting of 10 large volumes of Shells drawn & coloured from nature, and the other of 12 large folio volumes of the drawings of Birds offered by sale by Mr. Harding who lately obtained them at the sale of Mon^{sr} Raye's property at Amsterdam. Ordered that the Secretary be authorised to purchase these collections for any sum not exceeding £800.

The accounts listed in the back of the Minute Book state for 24 May 1826: 'Paid Harding and Co. for two collections of drawings of Shells and Birds for Radcliffe Library – £800–00.'

To unravel some of the details: 'Lord Sidmouth' was Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth (1757–1844), a prominent politician (once prime minister) and Chairman of the Trustees of the Radcliffe Trust 1804–1828. 'Dr. Williams' was George Williams (1762–1834), Sherardian Professor of Botany at the University of Oxford from 1796 to 1834 and Librarian of the Radcliffe Camera from 1810 to 1834 (Guest 2015). 'Mr. Harding' was Joseph Harding (1783–1843), a publisher, printer and bookseller at Finchley and Pall Mall, Westminster. 'Mon^{sr} Raye' was Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard. Levaillant is not mentioned in this part of the proceedings. A sum of £800 in 1826 would currently be about £65,000.

The collection was first listed in the printed catalogue of the Radcliffe Library, which was compiled by the librarian John Kidd (1775–1851) in 1835 (Kidd 1835: 48–49):

Oiseaux d'Afrique du cabinet de mons. Raye, d'Amsterdam; dessinés d'après nature. Figures 308. col. Accipitres, 50. Passeres 180. Scansores, 55. Gallinae, 23. The preceding 308 figures are all original coloured drawings.

Oiseaux divers du cabinet de mons. Raye, d'Amsterdam; dessinés d'après nature. Figures 622. col. Accipitres, 8. Passeres, 248. Scansores, 161. Gallinae, 53. Grallae, 104. Palmipedes, 48. The preceding 622 figures are all original coloured drawings.

This information was also recorded, rather more briefly, by Henry Wentworth Dyke Acland (1815–1900) in the next printed catalogue of 1877 (Acland 1877: 297):

LEVAILLANT, F. Oiseaux d'Afrique du cabinet de Mons. Raye, d'Amsterdam; dessiné d'après nature et décrits par Fr. Levaillant dans son voyage en Afrique. 308 Dessins col. 4 vols. fol.

LEVAILLANT, F. Oiseaux divers du cabinet de Mons. Raye, d'Amsterdam; dessiné d'après nature, et décrits, mais non publiés par Fr. Levaillant. 622 Dessins col. 8 vols. fol.

The history of these volumes of drawings has therefore been known since 1826, when they were first offered for purchase by Harding. As he stated that he had bought them in Amsterdam at an auction of the effects of Joan Raye, we should have been able to trace their provenance backwards, but this proved less than straightforward and necessitated delving into the life of Raye and his connection with Levaillant.

CONTENTS OF THE RADCLIFFE COLLECTION

There are 12 volumes in the Radcliffe Collection. The four volumes of the first series are devoted to 'Oiseaux d'Afrique' (hereafter referred to as 'African Series') and each has a printed title page⁵ (Figure 1):

Oiseaux d'Afrique / du Cabinet de / Monsieur Raye, d'Amsterdam / dessiné d'après nature et décrits / par Fr. Levaillant dans son Voyage en Afrique / Tome I [to IV].

[Birds of Africa, from the Cabinet of Mr. Raye of Amsterdam, drawn after nature and described, by Fr. Le Vaillant in his Travels in Africa, Volumes I to IV.]

The eight volumes of the second series are made up of ‘Oiseaux Divers’ (hereafter referred to as ‘Diverse Series’) and have similar printed title pages, with the addition: ‘mais non publiés [but not published]’ (Figure 2):

Oiseaux Divers / du Cabinet de / Monsieur Raye, d’Amsterdam / dessiné d’après nature / décrits, mais non publiés, par Fr. Le Vaillant / Tome I [to VIII].

[Diverse [various] birds, from the Cabinet of Mr. Raye of Amsterdam, drawn after nature, described, but not published, by Fr. Le Vaillant, Volumes I to VIII.]

These title pages reference Raye’s extensive cabinet and the link with Levaillant but are misleading. Despite the statement that the drawings in the African Series represented birds published by Levaillant, this series features several species not found in his books. In contrast, the Diverse Series claimed to contain unpublished drawings, but several species did appear in Levaillant’s works. Moreover, the titles imply that all the birds came from Raye’s cabinet, but this is incorrect and Raye would have been aware of the discrepancy had he seen these title pages during his life. Therefore, this could suggest that the collection was assembled or arranged, and the title pages added, after Raye’s death, either by the auctioneers in Amsterdam or by the bookseller Harding in London.

The 930 watercolour drawings in the Radcliffe Collection were each pasted on a separate sheet (leaving the reverse blank). The sheets are Folio sized (560 × 380 mm), while all the watercolours are drawn on smaller papers of Quarto size (300 × 240 mm). They are similar in composition, showing birds in side-view, either perched on a branch or sitting on the ground, with minimal background, and without a frame. This type of design was common at the time and was followed also in all the engraved plates in Levaillant’s bird books. In both series of the Radcliffe Collection there are a few exceptions to this format: in 22 drawings the subject matter is surrounded by a frame (see Figure 3), whereas in about 50 cases the artist added landscapes (see, for example, Figures 4, 5 and 6).

The African Series contains 308 watercolour drawings and the Diverse Series contains 622 watercolour drawings. Most drawings just show one bird, but some have several ‘figures’, that is, depictions of several individual birds, or of other features, like a nest, foot, beak, or feather, on the same sheet. In total there are 930 watercolour drawings comprising 1,083 figures (Table 1).

All drawings show a number in the lower right corner. Those for the African Series run consecutively throughout the four volumes, while in the Diverse Series each volume starts with number 1. It appears that these numbers were added before the volumes were bound, because there are 13 drawings without number, which show the same species as the preceding numbered one. Here identified as ‘inserts’, we have found one in the African Series and 12 in the Diverse Series (Table 1).

The birds on the watercolours are described in manuscript captions below the illustrations (the *verso* is always blank). These captions give the bird’s name in French, never in Dutch, and only rarely include scientific names. Some have additional information on sex, age or locality. None of the captions include any names of potential artists or collectors. Two types of handwriting are most common, but there may have been more than two people involved. Type 1 handwriting is bold and usually found centred below the drawing of the bird (see Figures 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 16 and 17). Type 2 handwriting has smaller



Figure 3. 'Martin Pecheur bleu à tête et poitrine blanche de l'Amerique'. Drawing of a grey-headed kingfisher, *Halcyon leucocephala* (Statius Müller, 1776). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 6, No. 7 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.

letters and is usually located more towards the left margin (see Figures 8, 13 and 18). However, many variations can be found. We suggest that the Type 1 captions may have been written by Levaillant, because they contain names and localities, some of which are not found in his published works. It seems unlikely that Raye himself worked on these annotations. As only a few documents certainly written by either Levaillant or Raye are known, further analysis will be required to elucidate who might have been responsible for the manuscript annotations.

When the Radcliffe Collection was assembled, it appears that the compiler of the African Series recognized that many of the drawings resembled, often in detail, the engraved plates found in the six volumes of the *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux d'Afrique* by Levaillant (1796–1810). Out of the 391 figures in the African Series, only 78 did not correspond to a published plate, with the remaining 313 all represented in Levaillant's work (see, for example, Figures 9 and 10).

The other drawings in the collection were combined as the Diverse Series, which is a good description, because these eight volumes show a wide variety of birds from different families and localities. Although not indicated by the compiler who divided the drawings into the two series, many of the Diverse drawings are also found in books authored by Levaillant (see Figures 11, 12, 13 and 14). The Radcliffe Collection includes 37 out of 51 figures (73%) in the *Oiseaux nouveaux* (Levaillant 1801–1802), 48 out of 145 figures (33%) in the *Perroquets* (Levaillant 1801–1805), 70 out of 133 figures (53%) in the *Oiseaux de paradis* (Levaillant 1801–1806), and 27 out of 85 figures (32%) in the *Promerops* (Levaillant 1807–1818). Of the 692 figures in the Diverse Series, 182 correspond to plates in these published works, whereas 510 figures (74%) are unpublished and unique to this collection.



Figure 4. 'L'Oiseau de Paradis Rouge, vu par devant, très rare. De La Nouvelle Guinée. moitié de grandeur naturelle.' Drawing of a red bird-of-paradise, *Paradisaea rubra* Daudin, 1800. Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 2, No. 77 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 5. Drawing of a rainbow lorikeet, *Trichoglossus haematodus* (Linnaeus, 1771). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 1, No. 39 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 6. 'Le Hocco du Perou'. Drawing of a great curassow, *Crax rubra* Linnaeus, 1758. Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 4, No. 81 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.

Table 1. Number of drawings and number of figures in the four volumes of the 'African Series' and the eight volumes of the 'Diverse Series' in the Radcliffe Collection, University of Oxford. An 'insert' is a drawing with the same number as the previous one. In the Diverse Series, volume 8, number 42 is missing.

Volume	Numbers	Total drawings	Drawings with 1 figure	Drawings with 2 figures	Drawings with 3 figures	Total figures
Radcliffe Collection: African Series ('Oiseaux d'Afrique')						
1	1-92 + 1 insert	93	80	12	1	107
2	93-173	81	50	31	0	112
3	174-255	82	55	27	0	109
4	256-307	52	41	11	0	63
	TOTALS	308	226	81	1	391
Radcliffe Collection: Diverse Series ('Oiseaux Divers')						
1	1-76	76	76	0	0	76
2	1-88 + 8 inserts	96	92	3	1	101
3	1-81	81	77	4	0	85
4	1-84 + 2 inserts	86	83	3	0	89
5	1-84	84	72	8	4	101
6	1-79 + 1 insert	80	74	4	2	88
7	1-50 + 1 insert	51	25	25	1	78
8	1-69	68	61	7	0	75
	TOTALS	622	560	54	8	692
Total Radcliffe Collection		930	786	135	9	1,083

THE SHARED INTERESTS OF RAYE AND LEVAILLANT

Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard⁵ was born on 21 November 1737 in Paramaribo, the capital of the Dutch colony of Surinam, after the early death of his father, governor Joan Raye (1698-1737). His mother was Charlotte Elizabeth van der Lith (1700-1753). In November 1747, the young Raye was sent to Amsterdam for his education, where he lived with his uncle Jacob Bicker Raye (1703-1777). Joan studied law at the University of Leiden, after which he travelled as part of a Dutch embassy to Turkey from 18 November 1764 to 29 November 1769. There are few sources about the remainder of Raye's life, which he spent in Amsterdam and in his country estate on the River Vecht near Maarssen, lastly in a house on the Herengracht no. 575. With capital derived from two sugar plantations in Surinam, he could devote himself to his love for the arts, natural history, and books, amassing an extensive private cabinet of natural history, a superb library, and many valuable works of art. Raye did not marry, and after his death in Amsterdam on 19 March 1823 all of his collections were sold.⁶

Levaillant and Raye were friends who shared a passion for the unexplored natural world. Levaillant met Raye in Amsterdam, both before and after his African sojourn.⁷ Levaillant called Raye 'mon ami [my friend]' on at least four occasions (Levaillant 1796: 2: pl. 233; 1801-1806: 2: pl. 4; 1807-1818: pls. 4, 18). They shared a common love of Surinam, where both were born. Levaillant always talked of Raye's cabinet in superlative terms: 'superbe', 'magnifique', 'belle', 'beau', 'riche'. Raye owned the best available copies (regarding size, paper, plates, bindings) of all books by Levaillant and assembled large sets of coloured drawings of birds connected with him, some bound in with the books, in addition to those now in the Radcliffe Collection. Among papers left by Levaillant when he died in 1827, there was a



Figure 7 (left). 'Le Corbi Calao'. Drawing of a noisy friarbird, *Philemon corniculatus* (Latham, 1790), showing Type 1 handwriting. Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 2, No. 30 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 8 (right). 'Merle à penne blanche. Pays des Grands Namaquois'; 'Le Nabouroup'. Drawing of a pale-winged starling, *Onychognathus nabouroup* (Daudin, 1800). Showing type 2 handwriting. Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux d'Afrique', Volume 2, No. 107 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.16). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 9 (left). 'la Cravate frisée. De la Mer du Sud'. Drawing of a tui, *Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae* (Gmelin, 1784). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux d'Afrique', Volume 2, No. 96 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.16). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 10 (right). 'La Cravate frisée' (the tui) in Levaillant, *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux d'Afrique*, Volume 2, No. 92 (1801). The plate is similar to the watercolour, but reversed, and branch and leaves are different. Courtesy of Zentralbibliothek Zürich.



Figure 11 (left). ‘pompapac. femelle’. Drawing of a pompadour cotinga, *Xipholena punicea* (Pallas, 1764). Radcliffe Collection ‘Oiseaux Divers’, Volume 8, No. 30 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 12 (right). Unsigned plate of the female pompadour cotinga (*Xipholena punicea*) in Levaillant, *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux nouveaux*, pl. 32 (1802), drawn after a specimen in Raye’s Cabinet (no. 137 in the 1827 catalogue). Courtesy of the Library of the University of Gothenburg.



Figure 13 (left). Drawing of a greater vasa parrot, *Coracopsis vasa* (Shaw, 1812), showing Type 1 handwriting (middle) and Type 2 (lower left). Radcliffe Collection ‘Oiseaux Divers’, Volume 1, No. 29: ‘le Grand Vasa, Mâle’; ‘grand perroquet noir’ (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 14 (right). Plate of the greater vasa parrot signed by Barraband in Levaillant, *Histoire naturelle des perroquets*, Volume 2, pl. 81 (1803). Courtesy of Université de Bordeaux. Direction de la Documentation. FR 1132–2.



Figure 15 (left). 'Coucou de Claas. Mâle. pays des Caffres'. Drawing of Klaas's cuckoo, *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Stephens, 1815). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux d'Afrique', Volume 3, No. 218 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.16). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 16 (right). 'ramier à collier. de L'Afrique'. Drawing of a black-backed fruit-dove, *Ptilinopus cinctus* (Temminck, 1810). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux d'Afrique', Volume 4, No. 278 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.16). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 17 (left). 'le proméfil' (Type 1 handwriting); 'Le proméfil' (Type 2 handwriting). Drawing of a magnificent riflebird, *Ptiloris magnificentus* (Vieillot, 1819). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 5, No. 9 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.



Figure 18 (right). 'Le Coulic Aracari, ou Le Toucan verd à ventre gris de Cajenne, Femelle'; 'L'ara Cari Coulic femelle'. Drawing of a Guianan toucanet, *Selenidera piperivora* (Linnaeus, 1758). Radcliffe Collection 'Oiseaux Divers', Volume 2, No. 11 (MS. Radcliffe Trust a.18). Photograph by Kees Rookmaaker. Courtesy of Weston Library, Oxford.

‘compte constant’ (now lost), presumably a kind of cashbook recording payments or deliveries between them (Rookmaaker 1989: 182).

Besides exploring African avifauna, it is clear from the contents and texts of Levaillant’s books that he had looked for unusual or unknown species of birds in all aviaries, cabinets and museums to which he could gain access, as far as we know mainly in France and The Netherlands. He decided to publish the available information on each species in a short text, with a depiction of the bird in life size and in colour. This ambitious programme was never completed, but his books nevertheless brought him lasting fame. His contemporaries acknowledged that many species were first described and illustrated in his books (Rookmaaker 1989: 190–193). Coloured drawings of bird specimens must have been of great importance to Levaillant, because without them it would be almost impossible to remember all the minute details of morphology and plumage.

The documentation about Raye’s life is too fragmentary to allow us to be certain about how he acquired the specimens for his cabinet or his endeavours to learn more about them. We can only guess that he bought many of the specimens which Levaillant brought back from Africa, and that Levaillant may have suggested further purchases from other dealers. The evidence appears to show that Raye allowed the Frenchman to work in his library and cabinet, they cooperated in finding artists to draw the specimens, and Levaillant helped to annotate the drawings. As the watercolours in the Radcliffe Collection are unsigned, it is impossible to be sure who produced them. Raye might have engaged a local Dutch artist, or Levaillant may have asked one of those collaborating with him on his books to travel to Holland. Only three draughtsmen are identified in Levaillant’s books: Johann Lebrecht Reinold, Jacques Barraband (1767–1809) and Auguste Pelletier (d.1847).⁸ There is no evidence that any of them stayed in Amsterdam, but it would not have been unusual if they had, as another French artist, Jean Gabriel Prêtre (1768–1849), is known to have spent several months in Holland to paint birds in other cabinets in the same period (Temminck 1815: 3: 641; Gassó Miracle 2021; Reeuwijk 2023: 18).

The drawings in the Radcliffe Collection in all likelihood passed through the hands of Levaillant. Perhaps he assembled them before selling (or donating) them to Raye, but there is no documentary evidence to support this suggestion. Levaillant may have reviewed the drawings to select those he wished to include in his books. He probably provided the names and localities to enhance the scientific value of the depictions. In any case, Levaillant’s involvement with the drawings in the Radcliffe Collection is undeniable.

THE AUCTIONS OF THE ART AND LIBRARY OF JOAN RAYE

Following Joan Raye’s death, his collections were sold in Amsterdam: the auction of his art works began on 10 May 1824 ([Raye] 1824); that of his library on 28 March 1825 ([Raye] 1825); and the auction of his collection of natural history specimens started on 3 July 1827 ([Raye] 1827). To obtain the drawings that now comprise the Radcliffe Collection, Harding or his representative must have attended one of the auctions of 1824 or 1825, given that the volumes arrived in Oxford in 1826. However, the available documentation leaves the actual sequence of events unclear.

Only a single copy of the printed catalogue for the art auction in 1824 is known to exist, without information about buyers or prices. Levaillant’s name is found in just one entry, but with no lot number or any indication of the page size (quarto or folio) of the drawings listed. It is printed on two pages, numbered 40* and 40**, probably inserted between

pages 40 and 41 after the rest of the catalogue had been printed. This lot is described ([Raye] 1824: 40*–40**) as:

[p. 40*] 'L^a. G*. – Eene zeer uitmuntende fraaije verzameling van honderd zes en zestig stuks afbeeldingen en gezigten in Africa. de onderscheidene Volkstammen, Planten, Gewassen, Gediertens, Slangen, Vogelen, Gereedschappen, Wapentuigen enz. Alles voorkomende in de Reizen van Le Vaillant, in Afrika. Uitmuntend fraai geteekend en naar het leven heerlijk gekleurd, onder opzicht van den genoemden Autheur. [p. 40**] Liggende deze kostbare en geheel eenige verzameling, met eene Lijst van den Inhoud, in één Omslag, en zal in ééne koop worden geveild.

[[p. 40*] L^a. G*. – A very excellent, beautiful collection of one hundred and sixty-six images and sights in Africa, the various tribes, plants, crops, animals, snakes, birds, tools, weaponry, etc. Everything that occurs in Le Vaillant's Travels in Africa. Excellent, beautifully drawn and wonderfully coloured from life, under the supervision of the aforementioned Author. [p. 40**] This valuable and entirely unique collection, with a list of the contents, is in one cover and will be auctioned in one sale.]

Clearly this cannot have been what became the Radcliffe Collection, given the number of drawings and wide-ranging subject matter. This set of loose drawings might not have been sold on this occasion, as essentially the same description appears in the catalogue of the sale of Raye's library in 1825 under Folio 70. However, the number of drawings was changed from 166 to CLXI (161), possibly a printer's error. This portfolio of loose drawings then appeared in the catalogue of the library of Lambertus Vincentius Ledebøer (1795–1891) of Rotterdam (Ledebøer 1878: 296) and was later bought by the Library of Parliament in Cape Town, where it is still preserved (Quinton *et al.* 1973; Rookmaaker 1989: 213, 1990).

The printed catalogue for the sale of Raye's library in 1825 is also available, with some annotated copies recording the prices offered, but without names of the buyers. Among 837 lots, all Levaillant's books were included, all stated to be in exquisite condition with special bindings, and some containing additional watercolour drawings (details in Rookmaaker 1989: 211). The purchasers remain unknown, but these copies are now preserved in Dutch libraries in Leiden (University Library and Naturalis) and The Hague (Royal Library). The set of drawings of shells listed as lot Folio 55 in this auction was clearly one of the three items offered for sale by Harding to the Radcliffe Trust in 1826.

One further set of bird drawings connected with Levaillant in quarto format included in the 1825 sale ([Raye] 1825: 29) needs further investigation:

Quarto 25. Collection d'un nombre considérable d'oiseaux, supérieurement peints en couleurs d'après nature, des six volumes du voyage en Afrique par le Cap de Bonne Espérance, par Le Vaillant, avec l'inscription de chaque oiseau. Manuscrit. 3 vol. dem. rel.

[Quarto 25. Collection of a considerable number of birds, superbly painted in colours from nature, from the six volumes of the Voyage to Africa by the Cape of Good Hope, by Le Vaillant, with the inscription of each bird. Manuscrit. 3 vol. half bound.]

The number of drawings showing birds is unspecified in this entry. A manuscript note in the catalogue adds that this lot was bought together with Folio 70 for the sum of 430 guilders. Folio 70 became part of the library of Ledebøer, but there is no entry corresponding with Quarto 25 in Ledebøer (1878). It is tempting to suggest that this lot Quarto 25 (bound in 3 volumes) is in fact the African series of the Radcliffe Collection. If that is the case, we must assume that Harding in London rearranged, pasted and rebound the quarto-sized watercolours with 'African' birds into four volumes of Folio size, possibly adding other watercolours obtained separately. The watercolours now combined in the Diverse Series do not appear to correspond with any entry in the catalogues of the auctions of Raye's library or cabinet. Maybe they were added to one of the auctions at a late date, just like the 166 drawings in the 1824 sale mentioned

above, with an additional catalogue insert that has not survived. However, despite these gaps in the history, the probability is high that the watercolours that now make up the Radcliffe Collection had their origin in the belongings of Joan Raye in Amsterdam.

THE AUCTION OF JOAN RAYE'S SPECIMENS

Creating cabinets of natural history like that of Raye was a common pastime of gentlemen of his period (Smit 1986), but most collections have been dispersed or lost. If all drawings in the Radcliffe Collection represent bird specimens in Raye's cabinet, as one interpretation of the title pages implies, the Radcliffe Collection would provide a rare opportunity to visualize what an eighteenth-century cabinet of that calibre might have looked like. It is therefore worth analysing how many bird species from the cabinet can also be found depicted in the drawings.

Four years after Raye's death his cabinet of natural history was auctioned ([Raye] 1827). The specimens were identified and listed for the sale catalogue by someone with a good knowledge of zoological classification, because each animal was not only provided with a French name, but also with a Latin binomen following (as stated in the preface to the catalogue) the system of Georges Cuvier (1769–1832).

Within the sale catalogue, Raye's specimens were divided into a total of 4,247 lots arranged according to classes: Mammals (73 lots), Birds (1,103), Crocodiles (1), Insects (437), Butterflies (518), Molluscs and Testacea (353), Univalves (902) and Minerals (860). In the 1,103 lots of birds, it is assumed that each lot represents one specimen, unless otherwise stated in the catalogue: lot 271 has 2 specimens, lots 362 and 364 have male and female, lot 363 has 4 specimens. Therefore, a total of 1,109 specimens was offered for sale. The same species name might appear in multiple lots: 592 species were listed with 1 lot each, 168 species with 2 lots each, 32 species with 3 lots, 11 species with 4 lots, and 7 species with 7 lots. Hence the catalogue listed a total of 810 species of birds in Raye's cabinet at the time of the sale.

Our comparison of the birds in the drawings and the specimens listed in the 1827 auction catalogue remains tentative. We have identified 752 species of birds depicted in the 1,083 figures of both series of the Radcliffe Collection, of which 420 species (56%) were also found in the catalogue of 1827. This means that there is nowhere near a complete match. In Levaillant's descriptions of the birds in all his five books combined, there are 70 instances of mentions of specimens preserved in the collection of Raye, although it is unlikely that such acknowledgements were comprehensive.⁹ However, it is clear that at least some of the birds examined by Levaillant in Raye's cabinet are depicted in the Radcliffe Collection.

CONCLUSION


Levaillant is known to have explored the private and public collections in Europe in search of new or little-known species of birds, and his influence on the collections of Raye is clear. His own travels added greatly to the knowledge of South African ornithology. His books with their lavish and accurate illustrations still represent the pinnacle of ornithological knowledge at the start of the nineteenth century. However, history has not been kind to

Levaillant. His greatest mistake, in hindsight, was his refusal to embrace the system of scientific nomenclature introduced by Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) in the middle of the eighteenth century. His decision might have been justifiable when he started to write the texts of his books in the 1780s but was outdated in the first decades of the nineteenth century when his books actually appeared.


Many new or little-known birds were introduced and expertly described in Levaillant's works. His contemporaries absorbed the unknown species into the binomial classification with amazing speed. For instance, the birds on the 300 plates in Levaillant's *Histoire naturelle des oiseaux d'Afrique* (1796–1810) were provided with 315 scientific names, often based exclusively on his descriptions (Rookmaaker 1989: 190). While most of these names have disappeared into synonymy, 88 species names (27% of 315) are still current.

Binomial names associated with species in the other four bird books by Levaillant also remain in use, although the percentage of these has never been calculated. Several specimens described and illustrated by Levaillant have subsequently been considered as type specimens, even if often lost. The engraved plates (generally in colour) in his books and possibly the unpublished watercolours in the Radcliffe Collection and elsewhere remain then as the only visual representation of the appearance of these specimens. In the absence of photographs, a drawing is closer to the specimen than an engraved plate, as it would be uncommon for plates to be engraved without a preparatory drawing. Hence the great historical, and often taxonomic, importance of the 930 watercolour drawings assembled in the Radcliffe Collection, which therefore stands as a true monument in ornithology.

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NOTES

¹ Hugh Edwin Strickland (1811–1853) compiled a 'Slip Catalogue' including notes on ornithological publications, possibly from the early 1840s. This is preserved in the Archives of the Museum of Zoology, University of Cambridge, UK, Papers and Manuscripts of Hugh E. Strickland. See online catalogue: <http://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb433-stricklandpapers> (accessed February 2025).

² The 12 volumes with watercolour drawings of birds (here ‘Radcliffe Collection’): Bodleian Library, Weston Library, Oxford, MS. Radcliffe Trust a. 16 (1–4) and a. 18–25. These volumes were moved in 2024 from the Radcliffe Science Library, where they had shelfmarks RR.y.78, 1–4 and RR.y.79, 1–8.

³ The 10 volumes with drawings of shells from the collection of Joan Raye: Bodleian Library, Weston Library, Oxford, MS. Radcliffe Trust a. 1–10. These volumes were moved in 2024 from the Radcliffe Science Library, where they had shelfmark RR.y.63. They were listed in the early catalogues of the library by Kidd (1835: 58) and Acland (1877: 411). The set is listed in the auction catalogue of Raye’s library ([Raye] 1825: 9, lot 55).

⁴ Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Special Collections, Minute Book of Dr. Radcliffe’s Trustees from 7 June 1816 to 13 March 1830 at MS. D.D. Radcl. c. 53.

⁵ The name Joan Raye van Breukelerwaard is found in several alternatives, all equally correct: Johan for Joan; Raije, Raaj, Raaye for Raye; Breukelerwaert, Breukelerwaard, Breukelwaard, Brukelward, Breukelerwaerth, Breukelerwaert, Breuklerwaert for Breukelerwaard. The extension was a noble title based on ownership of the ‘Ambachts-Heerlijkheid’ (serjeantry) Breukelerwaard in the Dutch province of Utrecht, which he inherited from his grandmother and had been in the family since 1660 (Doedens 2012: 50).

⁶ Joan Raye has been the subject of some short biographies in Dutch by van Benthem Jutting (1939, 1964: 178), Flinkenflögel (1988), Rookmaaker (1989: 211), Maanen (1994), Lisman *et al.* (2001) and Bastert (1905) for genealogy. His uncle Jacob Bicker Raye (1732–1772) kept a diary throughout his life describing events in Amsterdam, with a few glimpses into Joan’s life (van Nierop 1937; Beijerinck and de Boer 1963). Joan’s mission to Turkey has been described by Doedens and Mulder (1987), Vigne (2007) and Doedens (2012). Joan Raye’s testament or last will is kept at the Archives of the City of Amsterdam: 5075 Archief van de Notarissen ter Standplaats Amsterdam; 476 [notaris] Anthonij Karseboom.

⁷ Details of Levaillant’s early visit to The Netherlands are embedded in his long footnote describing the aviaries and cabinets of natural history (Levaillant 1796–1810: 1: text to pl. 12; translated in Rookmaaker *et al.* 2004: 31–33). He may have taken time for this research between his departure from Paris on 17 July 1780 and his embarkation on the *Held Woltemade* sailing to the Cape of Good Hope on 19 December 1780. Alternatively, he again spent time in The Netherlands between his return in Vlissingen on the *Ganges* on 17 November 1784 and his travels back home about two months later (Levaillant 1795: 2: 373). In his *Perroquets* (Levaillant 1801: 1: pl. 2) he mentioned a subsequent visit around 1801: ‘nous proposons, au reste, de nous en assurer dans un voyage que nous devons faire incessamment en Hollande, et de placer sous le même numéro, à côté de l’individu que nous publions aujourd’hui, le portrait de celui [we propose, moreover, to ensure this during a trip that we will make shortly to Holland, and to place its portrait under the same number, next to the individual that we are publishing today].’

⁸ Despite the continued appreciation of the execution of the engraved and coloured plates in Levaillant’s books, there is still very little information about the artists who signed them. Only Jacques Barraband (1767–1809) has been the subject of a biography, partly because he also worked on many other works of natural history (Guinot 2002). Auguste Pelletier (d. 1847) was Barraband’s pupil and brother-in-law, who always signed his plates with just ‘Auguste’. The earliest plates (nos. 1–115) in Levaillant 1796–1810 were signed by Johann Lebrecht Reinold, who (following Roncil 1957: 36) must not be confused with ‘Johann Friedrich Leberecht Reinhold of Gera (1744–1807)’ as often found in recent literature. The names of artists or engravers are absent from a large proportion of the plates.

⁹ Levaillant (throughout his books) mentioned in 70 cases that Raye owned at least one specimen in those birds. Only 44 of these species are figured in the Radcliffe Collection, indicated below by the * before the plate number. The drawings and the plates may be similar, but are rarely identical, even if reversed. Levaillant’s statements can be divided into four categories:

(A) In 12 descriptions, Levaillant stated that he had only examined a single specimen, which was found in Raye’s cabinet. It may be assumed that these specimens were also depicted on the plates, as there were no alternatives: Levaillant 1796–1810: 1: *45, 2: *55, 3: *117, 6: *284, 285; Levaillant 1801–1802: *24, *32 (female only); Levaillant 1801–1805: 1: *50, vol. 2: 97; Levaillant 1801–1806: 2: *5, 11, 27.

(B) In 2 descriptions, Levaillant referred to varieties of a species, of which he knew only a single specimen in Raye’s cabinet, but did not illustrate it on the plate: Levaillant 1796–1810: 2: 54 (feather only on plate), 5: 214 (Bengal variety).

(C) In 11 descriptions, Levaillant had seen a specimen in Raye’s cabinet as well as one or more others elsewhere. In the text he confirmed that it was Raye’s specimen depicted on the plate: Levaillant 1801–1802: *42; Levaillant 1801–1805: 1: *4, *48, 54, *55, *56, 69, *81, *101; Levaillant 1801–1806: 1: *16, 27.

(D) In 45 descriptions, Levaillant listed a specimen in Raye’s cabinet and also elsewhere, but did not specify that Raye’s specimen was used for the plate: Levaillant 1796–1810: 1: *13, *41, *46; 2: *56, *60, *79, *86; 4: 188; 5: *236; Levaillant 1801–1802: *16, 19, *23, *25; Levaillant 1801–1805: 1: *26, *28, 30, *32, 65; 2: *72, *77, *85, 88, 90, 126, 129, *130, *132; Levaillant 1801–1806: 1: *7, *9, 10, *19, *20, 23, 34, *43, 48; 2: 4, 26, 42, *43; Levaillant 1807–1818: part 1: *4, *16, 18, *24 and part 2: 7.

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