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# A critical response to Halley's (2022) 'Audubon's diary transcripts were doctored to support his false claim of personally discovering Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* (Audubon, 1834)'

by Peter B. Logan

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**SUMMARY.**—In a recent article (*Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 142: 329–342), Matthew Halley contended that John James Audubon (1785–1851) lied about his discovery of Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* (Audubon, 1834) during his 1833 Labrador expedition. Extracts from the naturalist's journal, published after his death in a biography prepared by his widow, Lucy (1787–1874), states that he was aboard ship 'Drawing all day' when the specimen was collected by one of his assistants. Consequently, Halley submitted that Audubon's claim in the *Ornithological biography* to having first sighted the bird was fabricated and that his granddaughter Maria R. Audubon (1843–1925) doctored her alternate version of the journal to be consistent before she destroyed the original. However, Halley overlooked critical facts, including evidence that Lucy's manuscript was compiled and edited by others; the published work contained numerous errors; and the journal entries for the previous two weeks were misdated and sometimes conjoined from multiple days, proving that her journal was not a faithful transcription of the original.

Biographers and scholars have long wrestled with the fact that John James Audubon (1785–1851), the French-American naturalist and artist responsible for *The birds of America* (1827–38), left a record of his life that was occasionally embellished or, at times, shamelessly untrue, as with his oft-repeated claim to having studied as a youth in the Paris atelier of Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) (Logan 2016). Now and then, he was inexact in relating events, examples of which can be found in the species accounts he wrote for the *Ornithological biography* (1831–39), the five-volume textual companion to his life-sized prints.

The problem was further compounded by the efforts made after his death by his widow, Lucy B. Audubon (1787–1874), and his granddaughter Maria R. Audubon (1843–1925), to burnish his legacy with the publication of revised versions of his journals, which became the principal accounts for certain periods of his life after Maria evidently destroyed most of the originals (Logan 2016).

I am well aware of these intractable difficulties. In *Audubon: America's greatest naturalist and his voyage of discovery to Labrador* (Logan 2016), repeatedly cited by Halley (2022), I traced and evaluated all of the known sources concerning the naturalist's expedition to Labrador in summer 1833 in order to present the most reliable account for each day of the trip. Minor inconsistencies between what Audubon wrote in the *Ornithological biography* and the different versions of his Labrador journal were not unusual.

Halley focused his attention on a single day of the expedition, 27 June 1833, in assessing whether Audubon personally discovered the first specimen of Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii* (Audubon, 1834). He concluded that, contrary to what Audubon and Maria wrote and what has long been believed, the naturalist was not present when the bird was

procured, pointing to the conflicting diary extract in Lucy's biography that he remained aboard his vessel 'Drawing all day' (Halley 2022: 333).

Halley's argument hinged on the assumption that this putative journal entry was transcribed by Lucy and likely reflected the content of the original holograph. However, he failed to consider the context in which Lucy's journal was prepared and edited before publication; the factual errors riddled throughout the text; and the misdating and occasional consolidation of daily entries in the weeks leading up to the bird's discovery, all of which significantly undermine his claim.

## Primary sources analysed by Halley

To ascertain whether Audubon played a role in the discovery of Lincoln's Sparrow, Halley examined the following primary sources.

Audubon's own narrative of the bird's discovery, published in Vol. 2 of *Ornithological biography*. He indicated that his party 'had been in Labrador nearly three weeks'<sup>1</sup> when he heard the 'sweet notes' (Audubon 1834: 539) of the bird while on an excursion with the members of his party. He immediately called to his companions, and they 'followed the songster as it flitted from one bush to another to evade our pursuit' (Audubon 1834: 539). Eventually, Thomas Lincoln (1812–83) of Dennysville, Maine, was able to collect it, and Audubon found it to be a species new to him, naming it in Lincoln's honour. He returned to the vessel to begin his drawing while the others continued their search for other birds.

(2) A brief extract purportedly from Audubon's journal on 27 June asserting that he was 'Drawing all day'. This statement appeared in *The life and adventures of John James Audubon, the naturalist*, an 1868 biography heavily redacted by Robert Buchanan (1841–1901) and published under his name as editor from a manuscript Lucy had forwarded to the London publisher (Buchanan 1868: 268). A year later, the statement appeared in identical form in *The life of John James Audubon, the naturalist*, an American edition marginally revised by Lucy and identifying her as the editor (Audubon 1869: 326).

(3) A substantially longer and more detailed description of the bird's discovery largely consistent with the account by Audubon, which was included in the version of the Labrador journal published by Maria (Audubon 1897). However, she departed from Audubon's narrative by stating that the bird was discovered on 27 June, whereas Audubon was vague about the date; by noting that a Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Corthylio calendula* (Linnaeus, 1766) that was shot and lost in the underbrush during the excursion was found later the same day, while Audubon stated that it was located the 'next day' (Audubon 1834: 546); and by indicating that the naturalist remained with the shore party rather than returning to the vessel to begin drawing the sparrow.<sup>2</sup>

(4) Finally, the contemporaneous diary kept by Lincoln, which was donated to the Delaware Museum of Natural History (now the Delaware Museum of Nature & Science), Wilmington, by a San Francisco bookseller in 1978 and only recently relocated by Halley in a locked cabinet at the museum. Despite Halley's assertion that it 'provides support for Lucy's version' (Halley 2022: 329), it is of no probative value. Lincoln never mentioned whether Audubon was present when he shot the bird (Halley 2022).

<sup>1</sup> In truth, it had been only ten days. He was evidently dating the discovery from 6 June, when his party sailed for Labrador from Eastport, Maine (Logan 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Halley considered these 'minor discrepancies' and speculated that 'Maria may have edited her transcript in an attempt to reconcile these minor timeline conflicts, to make her grandfather's published account seem more plausible' (Halley 2022: 335). The other possibility, which I accepted in my book, is that Maria's version of the journal for 27 June more closely adhered to the text of the original.

## Halley's rejection of Audubon's claim of discovery

After analysing the relevant sources, Halley asserted that Audubon was not present at the time Lincoln collected the specimen. He discounted Audubon's narrative and Maria's version of the journal that place him with the shore party because they conflict with Lucy's transcription, which states that Audubon stayed aboard on 27 June, 'Drawing all day' (Halley 2022: 333). He pointed out that 'on other days when Buchanan (1868) indicated that Audubon was drawing all day, the two diary transcripts are not in conflict' (Halley 2022: 334). He argued that it is unlikely Lucy miscopied that portion of the 27 June entry from either the previous or following day 'when he was evidently not drawing all day' (Halley 2022: 334).

Halley also maintained that subtle differences between the two journal entries for 28 June suggest that Maria's transcript was altered. In the version published by Lucy / Buchanan, the naturalist wrote, 'Began drawing a *new finch I discovered*, and outlined another' (Buchanan 1868: 268, Audubon 1869: 326–327; italics by Halley), whereas Maria's copy of the entry states, 'I began drawing at daylight, and finished *one of my new Finches* and outlined another' (Audubon 1897: 382, italics by Halley).

Halley contended that 'These differences are not trivial; the first includes a personal claim of discovery, whereas the second is vague about who discovered the new species' (Halley 2022: 335). In his mind, Maria, having 'doctored her transcript of Audubon's diary to bring it into alignment with his published version' (Halley 2022: 336), must have changed what Halley believed was the more reliable version of the original reflected in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies to avoid having the naturalist record 'his 'discovery' twice, in back-to-back entries' (Halley 2022: 336).

Finally, Halley formulated two, mutually exclusive hypotheses to help assess which of the two versions of the 27 June journal entry was 'the more faithful transcription' (Halley 2022: 335) by illustrating the ramifications of each. He concluded that Audubon, motivated by his narcissism, 'published a false story to bolster his authority with respect to the species' discovery, and then his granddaughter tried to cover it up' (Halley 2022: 340–341) by tracking her grandfather's published account in her version of the journal and destroying the original.

However, Halley disregarded multiple issues that plague the Lucy / Buchanan journal excerpts. When these are considered, the entry for 27 June cannot be deemed authoritative.

## Lucy's manuscript was collaborative and heavily redacted prior to publication

Halley stated that 'Audubon's diaries—the most important primary sources—were first transcribed by his widow, Lucy Audubon (1787–1874), and published in extracts by Buchanan (1868)' (Halley 2022: 329). While there is evidence that Lucy prepared a transcription shortly after Audubon returned from the expedition to assist him in writing the *Ornithological biography* (Corning 1969: 1: 269)<sup>3</sup>, there is no evidentiary support for Halley's claim that the extracts that appeared in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies decades

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Audubon to V. Audubon, 24 November 1833, original MSS, John James Audubon Papers 1821–1845 (Mss.B.Au25), American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA. Writing to his eldest son, Victor G. Audubon (1809–60), in London, Audubon reported that Lucy had 'transcribed, the whole of my Floridas and Labrador expeditions and arranged the whole in proper order' (Corning 1969: 1: 269) to help him write his bird biographies. The fact that both journals were in existence would have seemingly obviated the need to make an identical copy, but how she went about making the transcription and what was included is unknown because it did not survive.

later were transcribed by her or, even if they were, that they were not subsequently revised or edited by others prior to publication.

Lucy began collaborating on a biography of her husband with the Revd. Charles Coffin Adams (1810–88), the rector of St. Mary's Church in Manhattanville, New York, in the mid 1860s (Audubon 1869), a fact Halley failed to acknowledge. Adams rented her and a granddaughter a room in 1865, a year after Lucy was forced to sell her home following a series of financial setbacks (Harwood & Durant 1985, Spady 2020). Other biographies of the naturalist had begun to appear since Audubon's death<sup>4</sup>, and Lucy likely hoped to improve her situation through sales of the book, while also using her intimate familiarity with his life story to cement his legacy. Lucy and Adams initially agreed to divide the royalties equally but, as the work progressed, 'Lucy grew suspicious that Adams wanted more than his 50 percent share' (Spady 2020: 156). She moved out, taking the manuscript with her (Logan 2016).

'It is not clear today how Lucy and the Rev. Mr. Adams divided the job' (Harwood & Durant 1985: 78). Buchanan, hired by the London publisher Sampson Low, Son & Marston to edit the manuscript, understood it was Adams' work, saying that it was 'prepared by a friend of Mrs. Audubon's, in New York, chiefly consisting of extracts from the diary of the great American naturalist. It needed careful revision, and was, moreover, inordinately long' (Buchanan 1868: v).<sup>5</sup>

Buchanan proceeded to 'cut down what was prolix and unnecessary', resulting in 'a volume equal in bulk to about one-fifth of the original manuscript' (Buchanan 1868: v). Much of the material he deleted evidently came from Audubon's journals, which Buchanan found to be 'boring' (Harwood & Durant 1985: 78).

How the manuscript was altered cannot be determined because it was never returned to Lucy (Audubon 1869). The subsequent American edition, with the exception of minor additions and edits, and the removal of objectionable comments Buchanan had made about her husband, was substantially the same as the London edition. Many mistakes of fact remained. 'Even in reference to matters she obviously had known a great deal about she made no corrections, and she misspelled names of people and places familiar to her' (Harwood & Durant 1985: 80). She even failed to correct the erroneous date for her wedding (Logan 2016).

We will never know the extent to which the excerpts published by Lucy / Buchanan or, for that matter, the version given to us by Maria, vary from the original journal. As Halley admitted, the destruction of the holograph by Maria makes 'it impossible to verify either transcription' (Halley 2022: 330).

## An overlooked original journal sheds light on editing of the Labrador journal

The loss of Audubon's holographic Labrador journal does not foreclose an alternative approach in determining how and to what extent Lucy / Buchanan and Maria likely followed the text of the original.

Contrary to Halley's assertion, Maria did not destroy all the journals that she transcribed and published. Halley overlooked Audubon's most important one, documenting his historic

<sup>4</sup> Among the Audubon biographies that had appeared before Lucy and Adams began their work were St John (1856), Tuckerman (1857), Smiles (1861) and Peirce (1863).

<sup>5</sup> Despite Buchanan's statement, scholars believe that 'Lucy made major contributions and drew, as one of her granddaughters said, 'on her own recollections and voluminous diaries' as well as on Audubon's papers (Harwood & Durant 1985: 78). Whether she was involved in transcribing the extracts of the Labrador journal that are relevant here cannot be established.



trip to England in 1826 in search of a publisher and his successful meeting in Edinburgh with William Home Lizars (1788–1859), considered Scotland’s finest engraver, who agreed to produce *The birds of America* (Patterson 2011).

Lucy / Buchanan used it. Maria did too, incorporating segments in her ‘European journals’, the first of the three journals that made up the bulk of her two-volume book.<sup>6</sup> The holographic diary is now in the collection of the Field Museum in Chicago and has been transcribed and published separately by both Ford (1967, 1987) and Patterson (2011).<sup>7</sup>

What instantly becomes clear from a comparison of the original with those presented to the public by Lucy / Buchanan and Maria is the extent to which their versions condensed and rewrote Audubon’s entries. A suitable example is presented by the extracts for 28 September 1826.

Lucy / Buchanan’s version (Buchanan 1868: 108, Audubon 1869: 126):

‘September 28. Revisited Liverpool to consult about a prospectus for my book. Stayed with Mr. Rathbone, and met there Mr. John Bohn, the London bookseller, who advised me to go to Paris and consult about cost of publication, after which I ought to go to London and compare the outlays before fixing upon any plan. Mrs. Rathbone desired me to draw the wild turkey of America the size of my thumb-nail. This she had engraved on a precious stone in the form of a seal, and presented it to me.’

Maria’s version (Audubon 1897: 1: 127):

‘Green Bank, near Liverpool, September 28. At five this morning I left Manchester and its smoke behind me; but I left there the labors of about ten years of my life, fully one half of my collection. The ride was a wet one, heavy rain falling continuously. I was warmly welcomed by my good Liverpool friends, and though completely drenched I felt it not, so glad was I to be in Liverpool again. My being here is soon explained. I felt it best to see Dr. Traill and Mr. Roscoe, and I dined with the latter; we talked of Manchester and our friends there, and Mr. Roscoe thought well of the subscription book. From here to Green Bank, where I am literally *at home*. Mr. Rathbone and Mr. Roscoe will both aid me in the drawing up of a prospectus for my work.’

The Lucy / Buchanan version briefly summarised—in their words, not Audubon’s—his lengthy account of the events of four separate days—28 September, when Audubon travelled by coach from Manchester to Liverpool (Patterson 2011); 29 September, when he met ‘M<sup>r</sup> Bohn [ms: Bhoon] from London, an Immense Book seller (not publisher)’ (Patterson 2011: 202); 1 October, when Audubon spent the evening at Green Bank, the home outside Liverpool of Hannah Mary Rathbone I (1761–1839), the matriarch of the influential merchant family, who asked him ‘if I would make a sketch of a Wild Turkey for her’ (Patterson 2011: 209) so she could have a seal made for him with the engraved image; and 19 November, when he received the ‘Beautiful Seal of the Wild Turkey Cock’ (Patterson 2011: 302).

By comparison, Maria limited her journal to the events of September 28. While she adopted some of her grandfather’s wording, she revised and summarised the rest, reducing what was an entry in excess of 900 words to 137 in hers.

<sup>6</sup> The second was the Labrador journal, and the last was the 1843 Missouri River journal (Audubon 1897).

<sup>7</sup> In compiling The Library of America’s *John James Audubon: writings & drawings*, Irmscher (1999) noted discrepancies between Ford’s edition of the 1826 journal and the original. Pursuing this lead, Patterson subsequently discovered she had made a number of revisions and modifications to the text (Patterson 2011), making his edition the preferred one.

Numerous other entries follow a similar pattern. Of the two versions, Maria's edition incorporated far more of the content, although still a fraction of the original. However, she rewrote and made substantial revisions to the text, deleting Audubon's colourful but verbose descriptions or those that offended her Victorian sensibility (Harwood & Durant 1985).

Presumably, Lucy / Buchanan and Maria, respectively, took much the same approach in editing the Labrador journal, although the former included an abridged extract for each day, unlike how they had handled the 1826 extracts. In most cases, both versions contain entries that are similar enough that we can see they originated from the same source. In a few instances, Lucy / Buchanan added details that are missing from Maria's version (Logan 2016). But, without question, Maria included significantly more of the destroyed holograph than Lucy / Buchanan did.<sup>8</sup>

### Previous entries in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies were misdated

In seeking to explain the narrative conflict in the 27 June entries, Halley has likewise ignored the fact that the editors of the Lucy / Buchanan biographies misdated the preceding journal entries and, on the day before, conjoined the events of separate days, providing a likely explanation for the disparity with Maria's edition.

From 12 through 25 June, the entries recount events that actually occurred one or two days earlier (Logan 2016: 442, note 18). The dates shown in Maria's journal were consistent with the calendar<sup>9</sup>, with corroboration coming from a letter by one of Audubon's young companions, George C. Shattuck Jr. (1813–93)<sup>10</sup>, and the ship's log kept by Cmdr. Henry Wolsey Bayfield (1795–1885) of the Royal Navy, who was conducting a hydrographic survey of the Labrador coastline aboard the schooner *Gulnare* and had anchored in the same harbour as Audubon's schooner, the *Ripley*, on 22 June (McKenzie 1984). Whoever prepared the Lucy / Buchanan extracts for publication failed to accurately transcribe the dates from the original journal.

While the proper timeline appears to have been restored with the extract for 26 June, the entry for that date actually included observations by Audubon that Maria indicated were from both 25 and 26 June, a compression of two days into one similar to how the 1826 journal had been edited.<sup>11</sup>

Halley dismissed the possibility that Lucy / Buchanan made the same mistake on 27 June, saying 'it seems unlikely that the comment ('Drawing all day') was miscopied by Lucy from the 26 June or 28 June entries, when he was evidently not drawing all day' (Halley 2022: 334). Setting aside the fact there is no evidence Lucy copied any part of the holograph for publication, Halley's assumption that Audubon was not drawing all day on 26 June is not reflected in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869). He had to turn to Maria's journal, and there Audubon only mentioned that it had 'rained nearly

<sup>8</sup> In the course of my research, I concluded that the Lucy / Buchanan version of the Labrador journal, while far less comprehensive than Maria's edition, often appeared closer to Audubon's voice, as reflected in his extant diaries and letters (Logan 2016). This suggested that they made fewer changes to the extracts they published, in marked contrast to the efforts Maria made to improve upon the holograph. However, this does not alter my opinion regarding the lack of fidelity in Lucy / Buchanan's 27 June entry to the original for the reasons expressed herein.

<sup>9</sup> However, the entry for 21 June was erroneously dated 22 June (Audubon 1897: 372). Whether this was Maria's error or that of the printer is unknown.

<sup>10</sup> G. C. Shattuck Jr. to G. C. Shattuck Sr., 22 June 1833, original MSS, George Cheyne Shattuck Papers (Ms. N-909), Box 5, Vol. 11 (June 1833), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the Lucy / Buchanan extract for 21 June contains details that appear in Maria's journal on 19 and 22 June (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869, Audubon 1897).

all day, but we have all been on shore, to be beaten back by the rain and the mosquitoes' (Audubon 1897: 381). Bayfield confirmed that it rained all day but 'cleared for a few minutes at 4 PM' (McKenzie 1984: vol. 1: 237).

We have no information as to how long the shore excursion lasted. Given the miserable conditions, Audubon and his companions may well have retreated to the vessel after a few hours, and he spent the rest of the day drawing, as he often did during inclement weather (Logan 2016).<sup>12</sup> Thus, the comment 'Drawing all day' could very easily refer to his activities on 26 June, which was then erroneously incorporated in the 27 June entry.

It is equally possible that the phrase was conflated with the 28 June entry, when the weather, according to both versions of the journal, was 'rainy, foggy, dark, and cold' (Buchanan 1868: 268, Audubon 1869: 326, Audubon 1897: 382). Audubon began drawing the Lincoln's Sparrow 'at daylight' (Audubon 1897: 382) and continued until noon, when the wind shifted and created a swell that made it impossible to keep working (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869, Audubon 1897).

At this northern latitude, dawn occurred around 03.00 h on 17 June (Audubon 1897, although it is misdated 19 June<sup>13</sup> in Buchanan 1868 and Audubon 1869), and three days later, Audubon indicated there was 'scarcely any darkness now' (Audubon 1897: 371, misdated 22 June in Buchanan 1868: 258 and Audubon 1869: 315). To Audubon, the hours he spent on his illustration on 28 June might well have qualified as a day's worth of drawing since the crew of the *Ripley* soon began preparations to sail with the changing winds (Logan 2016).

Halley noted that in two other instances, 4 July and 7 July, both versions of the journal are in agreement that Audubon was drawing all day (Halley 2022). However, he made no effort to explain how consistency between the journals on these dates offers a window into the conflict between the 27 June entries. Halley also failed to acknowledge that, according to Maria's journal, Audubon spent time ashore on both 4 July ('After dinner John and I went on shore to release a *Uria grylle*<sup>14</sup> that we had confined in the fissure of a rock': Audubon 1897: 389) and 7 July ('When fatigued with drawing I went on shore for exercise, and saw many pretty flowers...': Audubon 1897: 391).

### Halley's hypotheses testing fails to validate his conclusion

To help determine which of the versions of the 27 June journal entry is likely 'the more faithful transcription' (Halley 2022: 335), Halley formulated two mutually exclusive hypotheses, based on the presumption that each of the extracts is authoritative. He then separately sought to negate each hypothesis by elucidating the corresponding implications of that presumption, ultimately concluding that the Lucy / Buchanan extract is closer to the original. However, when assessed with evidence Halley has overlooked or ignored, his analysis falls apart.

He posited that if Maria's putative journal entry was truer to the original, then Lucy would have had to (1) replace 'Audubon's exciting passage about the discovery of *M. lincolni*, the first new species discovered on the Labrador expedition, with the uneventful phrase 'Drawing all day,' in the 27 June entry,' which 'requires not only an omission, but an addition, to the diary text' (Halley 2022: 335); and (2) change 'I began drawing at daylight,

<sup>12</sup> According to the Lucy / Buchanan extracts and / or Maria's journal, Audubon was at his drawing table on the *Ripley* during inclement weather on 28 June; 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 19, 27 and 29 July; and 1 and 4 August. In the *Ornithological biography*, Audubon also described working on his illustration of a pair of Labrador Falcons on 7 August: '...it rained for hours, and the water fell on my paper and colours all the while from the rigging of the *Ripley*' (Audubon 1834: 554).

<sup>13</sup> This was the first of the two separate entries dated 19 June in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies.

<sup>14</sup> Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* (Linnaeus, 1758).



and finished one of my new Finches and outlined another' found in Maria's journal on 28 June (Audubon 1897: 382), to 'Began drawing a new finch I discovered, and outlined another' (Buchanan 1868: 268, Audubon 1869: 326–327) in the Lucy / Buchanan's version (Halley 2022: 335). In his opinion, Lucy would have had no motive to do so, lending validity to her version of the journal.

With respect to the first point, Halley wholly disregarded the substance of the editorial note in the Lucy / Buchanan biographies immediately preceding the 27 June entry (Halley 2022: 333, fig. 2). The editors, identified by the pronoun 'we', announced that they had omitted the portions of the journal 'taken up with an account of the birds, and nests, and eggs found here, and matters related to ornithology', which the naturalist had used to write his *Ornithological biography*, and 'used only that part of the records which has a more general interest' (Buchanan 1868: 268, Audubon 1869: 326).

Thus, even if Lucy 'was aware of the importance of her late husband's new discoveries, to the success of his books, and that including diary entries relevant to those discoveries would make her own book more successful' (Halley 2022: 335), as Halley imagined, the discovery of Lincoln's Sparrow was omitted for editorial reasons.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, there is no mention in the Lucy / Buchanan extracts of Audubon's discovery and collection of another new species, Boreal Chickadee *Poecile hudsonicus* (J. R. Forster, 1772), on 18 July (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869). In both cases, those accounts are included in the *Ornithological biography* (Audubon 1834), as they are in Maria's journal.

As for Halley's second point, once the tale of the sparrow's discovery was deleted from the manuscript, a reference to Audubon's role in finding the bird in the following day's entry on 28 June, as he was working on his drawing, was to be entirely expected. We cannot know if Lucy had anything to do with it before the manuscript was sent to England, but contrary to Halley's assessment, she certainly had a motive to include this detail.

Moreover, given the destruction of the original journal, it is impossible to know how, if at all, the 28 June entry in either journal was revised. We know that both versions of the journal were heavily edited. Thus, comparing the extracts for 28 June, as Halley does by parsing the disparate ways they are expressed and surmising what the motives of the editors may have been, is pure conjecture.

Halley's failure to negate this hypothesis effectively establishes that Maria's version is more likely to be truer to the original. Consequently, there is no need to consider the alternative hypothesis, which presumes the authenticity of the Lucy / Buchanan extract.

## Additional commentary

The remainder of Halley's paper focuses on an examination of Lincoln's diary and the contemporary custom among 19th-century ornithologists and their hired collectors as to who had the right to claim the discovery of a new species. Neither is on point.

Lincoln's diary does not provide support for the Lucy / Buchanan version of the journal, despite Halley's claim to the contrary. Lincoln never addressed the issue of Audubon's role in discovering Lincoln's Sparrow. He left his diary blank from 20 through 30 June, as Halley conceded. When he returned to its pages on 1 July, he did not mention that he had procured the specimen, even though Audubon had already been at work on the drawing for two days (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869, Audubon 1897, Halley 2022). The only thing he had to say about their recent excursions while anchored among the Esquimaux Islands, was that '[t]here were but few birds breeding there and [those] so shy that it was almost impossible

<sup>15</sup> The placement of the editorial note right before the 27 June entry strongly suggests that Audubon's handwritten entry for that date consisted of ornithological details.

to get at them' (Halley 2022: 337). This appears to be entirely consistent with the description by Lincoln's son, Dr Arthur T. Lincoln (1856–1926), of his father having been 'extremely modest about his own attainments' (Townsend 1924: 239).

According to Halley, Lincoln's sole reference to the bird was on 4 July, and then his only comment was that 'Mr. A. finished a drawing of a new finch which I [shot] at Esquimaux Islands. There are several rare and [beautiful] plants peculiar to the country represented upon [it]' (Halley 2022: 338). Even then, Lincoln did not acknowledge that he had collected the three plants Audubon used as a background, a fact included in Maria's journal but missing from the Lucy / Buchanan extract.

With nothing in Lincoln's diary to support his thesis, Halley then speculated that Lincoln's 'half-hearted attempt to destroy the pages containing his expedition diary suggests he may have been aware they contained passages that cast doubt on Audubon's (1834) published account' (Halley 2022: 336). However, Halley failed to identify a single passage from the diary that contradicts Audubon's narrative.

Other extant accounts of the expedition by members of Audubon's party also do not address whether Audubon discovered the sparrow.<sup>16</sup> Joseph Coolidge (1815–1901) was the subject of an 1896 profile in the *San Francisco Call*, a daily newspaper, in which he related previously unpublished tales about the expedition and was not averse to criticising the naturalist as 'a free drinker' (Logan 2016: 432). He never mentioned whether Audubon was with the shore party. Nor did William Ingalls (1813–1903), who corresponded with and was interviewed in person shortly before his death by Ruthven Deane (1851–1934), a fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union and well-known Audubon scholar (Deane 1910, Osgood 1935).

Halley maintained that Ingalls 'took issue with his personal narratives and plainly stated that Audubon rarely left the boat during the expedition' (Halley 2022: 333), referencing a vague statement in a letter Ingalls wrote to Deane in 1902, almost 70 years later ('Mr. Audubon being almost all the time aboard at work did not have so good a knowledge of the *moss* of which he speaks, as we boys did...': Deane 1910: 45). Ingalls provided no specifics as to Audubon's activities on 27 June. He was merely saying that the young men who accompanied the naturalist spent more time ashore than Audubon did, no surprise given that their only responsibilities were 'to explore, to gather information, to hunt and to bring ourselves and *new species of birds*, home at night' (Deane 1910: 45).

Both versions of the journal reflect that Audubon remained aboard the schooner when the weather was bad or he had birds to draw. However, on other days, especially when the weather was nice, as it was after clearing early on 27 June, he frequently went ashore over the course of the expedition (Logan 2016).<sup>17</sup>

It also bears noting that Audubon was the only member of the expedition who knew the birds of eastern North America well enough to have recognised the song of the Lincoln's Sparrow as that of a possible new species. Had he been absent from the excursion party on 27 June and not exhorted his young colleagues to collect it, one can reasonably question whether they would have prevailed.

With respect to Audubon's financial arrangement with his young companions, Halley asserted that during the 19th century, 'it was generally assumed that a scientist's obligation

<sup>16</sup> Audubon's youngest son, John W. Audubon (1812–62), did not leave an account of the trip as far as we know (Logan 2016). A contemporaneous journal that George C. Shattuck Jr. kept during the expedition is believed to have been lost or destroyed (Townsend 1918).

<sup>17</sup> According to Maria's journal, Audubon spent some portion of the day ashore in Labrador on 17, 22, 23, 27 and 29 June; 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30 and 31 July; and 3 August (Audubon 1897), belying Halley's claim that he 'rarely left the boat' (Halley 2022: 333).

to the collector, with respect to acknowledging their role in the discovery of a new species, was discharged' by being 'paid directly' or 'otherwise financially indebted (e.g., for travel costs) to the ornithologists who published their discoveries' (Halley 2022: 338). Audubon, however, did not compensate Lincoln or the others for their services; indeed, he asked them to reimburse him for the cost of their food during the voyage, amounting to around \$35 each (about \$1,129 in 2021 dollars: Webster 2022).<sup>18</sup> Thus, Halley argued that Audubon's purportedly false narrative about discovering Lincoln's Sparrow cannot be justified by his role as the publishing scientist.

The comparison Halley seeks to draw is inapposite. The young men who accompanied Audubon and his son John to Labrador were eager volunteers pursuing their own passions and purpose, not hired collectors expecting to be paid. Lincoln was one 'who ever since his childhood [had] manifested a decided preference for ornithological pursuits' (Audubon 1834: 437). The opportunity to spend the summer chasing birds alongside the famous naturalist must have been an appealing proposition. George Shattuck Jr., who had just finished his classes at the Medical School of Maine when a letter from his father arrived in early May with Audubon's invitation, replied with the reasons he wanted to go:

'With such a man as Mr Audubon under what great advantages shall I prosecute the study of natural history, of comparative anatomy. And are not these worth acquiring of themselves, are they not worth acquiring, as bearing upon the profession I am to pursue. Can I ever study them under so great advantages. Then I expect great benefit to my bodily health, from the bodily exertions I shall be compelled to make, and from the exposure to the open air. You see then the objects which I expect to gain'.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, Audubon financed the lion's share of the expedition, roughly \$2,000 (\$64,500 in 2021 dollars: Webster 2022).<sup>20</sup> Lincoln's reimbursement for his food was a trifling sum in comparison. Even if Audubon was bound by the customary practice Halley described, Lincoln would have been financially indebted to him for a portion of the travel costs, discharging any obligation to recognise Lincoln's role as the bird's collector. Nevertheless, Audubon not only acknowledged Lincoln as the one who procured the specimen but named the species after him.

As a final note, if Audubon's narcissism drove him to fabricate his narrative so he could claim to have first discovered Lincoln's Sparrow, as Halley claimed, it makes little sense that Audubon subsequently acknowledged in his species account that upon his return to New York, he found that specimens of the bird were already lying in the collection of William Cooper (1798–1864), partially diminishing the significance of his discovery (Audubon 1834).

<sup>18</sup> Halley estimated that the \$35, adjusted for inflation, would be 'approximately \$1,700 today' (Halley 2022: 338). He does not cite a reference for his inflation conversion, but the second source I consulted also places the figure substantially lower, at \$1,106 (Friedman 2022). In both cases, I converted the 1833 cost to 2021 dollars, the inflation rate of 2022 having yet to be determined when Halley's article was published.

<sup>19</sup> George C. Shattuck Jr. to George C. Shattuck Sr., 5 May 1833, original MSS, George Cheyne Shattuck Papers (Ms. N-909), Box 5, Vol. 11 (1–13 May 1833), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

<sup>20</sup> Halley noted that there is a disparity in the estimated cost of the Labrador expedition, with Audubon informing his eldest son, Victor G. Audubon, in a post-expedition letter that it was 'about \$2,000' (Corning 1969, 1: 243), while Maria reported it was 'approximately \$1,500' (Audubon 1897: 346). I am inclined to accept Audubon's figure given the fact his letter was written shortly after he returned, and he had no reason to misrepresent the amount to his son.

## Other errors in Halley's paper

Halley's paper contains multiple factual errors that must be noted, to ensure they are not perpetuated by future scholars. Halley erroneously declared that 'Maria admitted destroying the original diaries in her possession (only one, from 1820–21, is now extant, see Corning 1929)' (Halley 2022: 330).<sup>21</sup> In fact, Maria confessed only to the destruction of Audubon's journal of 1822–24, which covered a period when the family was suffering 'extreme poverty' (Arthur 1937: 243). The 1826 journal, which comprised a portion of her European journals, survived, as did fragments of the Missouri River journal (Patterson 2016). However, to advance his claim that she destroyed them all, Halley altered the quoted portion of Maria's letter with the purported admission ('I burned [them] myself in 1895...I had copied from [them] all I ever meant to give to the public...' (Arthur 1937: 243)' (Halley 2022: 330) by substituting 'them' for 'it', a troubling departure from scholarly norms.

This is not to suggest that Maria didn't destroy the Labrador journal and possibly others, as I and other scholars widely believe. However, I know of no explicit admission by her to having done so.

Halley also added error-ridden bracketed material to a quote from the *Ornithological biography*. According to Halley, 'in late August 1832, when Lincoln 'offered to lead [Audubon] to those retired woods [at Point Lepreau, Quebec] where the Spruce Partridges are found' (Audubon 1834: 437), he was also asked to contribute to the expenses' (Halley 2022: 340). The excursion to which Audubon was referring was actually made in the vicinity of 'the delightful little village' of Dennysville, Maine, where the Audubon family had been invited to stay with the Lincoln family, as is clear from Audubon's narrative (Audubon 1834: 437).<sup>22</sup> Audubon's trip to Point Lepreau, New Brunswick (not Quebec), occurred in May 1833 (Logan 2016).

In a similar vein, Halley misrepresented my views, writing that 'biographers have generally assumed that Maria destroyed the diaries because 'there were aspects of Audubon's private musings [she] did not wish to share with the public' (Logan 2016: xv)' (Halley 2022: 330). The full sentence in my biography, which includes a prefatory clause Halley omitted ('In view of the repressed cultural attitudes that prevailed at the time': Logan 2016: xv), indicates that this was among the reasons I believed she chose to revise her grandfather's journals, not in regard to her decision to destroy them.

In the legend to his fig. 1, Halley stated that 'Audubon's text account of 'Lincoln's Finch / *Fringilla Lincolnii*' (Audubon '1834': 539) was not published until 'after 1 January 1835' despite its preface being dated '1st December 1834' (Stone 1906: 303)' (Halley 2022: 331). Halley's reliance on an unsourced statement by Witmer Stone (1866–1939) in an early 20th-century article ('The preface is dated December 1 but it is quite likely that it did not appear until after January 1, 1835'; Stone 1906: 303), long before Audubon's correspondence became generally accessible to scholars<sup>23</sup>, is misplaced. In fact, Audubon announced in

<sup>21</sup> The referenced 1820–21 diary, known as the Mississippi River journal, was reportedly not in Maria's possession when she transcribed the other journals for her book (Deane 1904). It is now in the collection of the Ernst Mayr Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, Spec. Coll. MCZ F117.

<sup>22</sup> Audubon wrote that with Lincoln as a guide, they 'set out on the 27th of August, my two sons accompanying us' (Audubon 1834: 437). They searched 'the whole day...yet not a single Grouse did we find...' (Audubon 1834: 437). Upon their 'return towards sunset, as we were crossing a meadow belonging to [Lincoln's] father, not more than a quarter of a mile from the village', they learned from 'people employed in making hay' that 'about half an hour after our departure they had seen a fine covey' (Audubon 1834: 437–438).

<sup>23</sup> The *letters of John James Audubon, 1826–1840*, edited by Howard Corning, was first published in a two-volume edition of 225 copies in 1930.



a letter on 10 December 1834 to his close friend the Revd. John Bachman (1790–1874) of Charleston, South Carolina, that the second volume of the *Ornithological biography* ‘is out!’ (Corning 1969: 55).<sup>24</sup> He promised to send ‘a few English copies’ from Liverpool the following week (Corning 1969: 2: 56).

Halley also erred in stating that Audubon’s vessel ‘departed on 29 June’ (Halley 2022: 338) from its anchorage near the Esquimaux Islands, where the sparrow was collected. The *Ripley* actually left harbour on 28 June (Buchanan 1868, Audubon 1869, Audubon 1897, McKenzie 1984).

Further, Halley’s contention that Audubon’s assistants ‘were members of wealthy families’ (Halley 2022: 338) is true only for three of the four young men who signed on for the expedition. The fourth, Joe Coolidge, was the 18-year-old son of the captain of the US Revenue Cutter *Swiftsure*, assigned to the Passamaquoddy Customs District in Eastport, Maine (Logan 2016), hardly a man of means.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Halley stated that ‘On 31 May 1833, immediately after listing the members of his expedition party (including Lincoln) in a letter to his eldest son, Victor Gifford Audubon (1809–60), Audubon wrote (my italics): ‘we pay three hundred and fifty Dollars per month for the entire use of the Vessel with men &c. but have to supply ourselves with provisions’ (Corning 1969: 231)’ (Halley 2022: 338–339). While the letter was dated 31 May, its contents and his correspondence to Lucy make clear that it was written on 20 or 21 May. It was post-dated because Audubon planned to mail it to Lucy for transmittal to Victor in London shortly before he expected to sail for Labrador on 1 June. As a consequence, only Lincoln, Shattuck, and his son John were identified in the letter as members of the expedition. Ingalls and Coolidge would join the group later that month. Additionally, by 22 May, Audubon had altered his arrangement with the owners of the *Ripley*, with them agreeing to supply the provisions for each of the members of his party at \$3 per week (Logan 2016). Audubon had certainly hoped to have his assistants reimburse him for the pro rata cost of their food (Logan 2016). But, contrary to Halley’s assumption, there is some doubt they all did. In the Lucy / Buchanan journal, Audubon wrote with obvious rancour at the end of the voyage that ‘I was not very well pleased that nearly the whole burden of the Labrador voyage was put on my shoulders, or rather taken out of my poor purse; but I was silent, and no one knew my thoughts on that subject’ (Buchanan 1868: 309, Audubon 1869: 375).<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Halley’s revisionist claim that Audubon fabricated his account of the discovery of Lincoln’s Sparrow requires more than conjectural proof of its validity. However, he has overlooked or ignored critical facts that refute his argument. When all the evidence is considered, the brief extract in Lucy / Buchanan’s heavily redacted version of the Labrador journal that Audubon was ‘Drawing all day’ on 27 June, upon which Halley principally relied, does not stand up to scrutiny as an authoritative source. At the same time, the other two primary sources, *Ornithological biography* and Maria’s rewritten journal, suffer from their own reliability issues and cannot be entirely trusted, as serious

<sup>24</sup> J. J. Audubon to J. Bachman, 10 December 1834. Original MSS in the John James Audubon Papers (bMS Am1482), letter 68, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. The correct publication date was also referenced in Logan (2016) and Logan & Sidor (2021).

<sup>25</sup> In July 1836, Congress increased the salary of Revenue Cutter captains to \$1,200 annually (Anon. 2022). This would equate to approximately \$35,000 in 2021 dollars (Webster 2022).

<sup>26</sup> This comment does not appear in Maria’s edition of the journal. She apparently felt her grandfather’s resentment at not being reimbursed for some of the costs, as he had expected, placed him in a negative light.



scholars and biographers have known for decades. To his credit, Halley has highlighted this point, even as he has fallen short in his effort to discredit Audubon's narrative of the bird's discovery.

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