

GREENWICH NEWS, Thursday, May 10, 1990

'Science in Art' at Audubon

"Science in Art: The Bird Paintings of H. Douglas Pratt" will open on Sunday, May 13, at the Audubon Center.

Mr. Pratt, a freelance ornithological illustrator, is known for his color plates in the National Geographic Society's "Field Guide to the Birds of North America." His paintings have been published in a number of books, journals and magazines including The Mammals of Louisiana and its Adjacent Waters, Louisiana Birds, Hawaii Birds, National Wildlife, American Birds, Defenders, The Living Bird, Natural History and Audubon Magazine.

A co-author of "A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific," Mr. Pratt inaugurated a major ex-

hibition of paintings from this and other works on Pacific birds at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu in 1987. He has also designed postage stamps depicting native birds for the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. This Audubon show will feature a number of illustrations for "Birds of Colonial Williamsburg" published in 1989.

An opening reception will be held on May 13 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Audubon Center. The public is invited to meet Mr. Pratt and enjoy a first look at this unique exhibition.

The Audubon Center is located at 613 Riversville Road in north Greenwich. For more information, call the center at 869-5272.

Pratt paintings show Audubon's influence

By KATE F. JENNINGS

Original watercolor illustrations portraying a variety of species of North American and Hawaiian birds by H. Douglas Pratt are on display at the Audubon Center. They are excellent examples of the legacy of John J. Audubon and a welcome accompaniment to the return of spring.

Impeccably dressed, speaking with a gentle southern drawl that discloses his Louisiana heritage, Mr. Pratt described the influence of Audubon upon his work:

"In 1983, I had the opportunity to see a wonderful exhibit of Audubon's original paintings. One of his owls was so carefully rendered you could feel the softness of its feathers. I refer to his work because he was the first artist to show birds in their natural habitats rather than simply as scientific specimens. And his line and coloring were so sophisticated they are still exemplars of technique today.

"What is interesting is that he planned his originals for reproduction, not for public view, and one can see all kinds of notations, errors and changes in them. But his gift of draftsmanship and sensitivity is apparent and the prints lose some of the delicacy and three-dimensionality of the originals."

"In addition, unlike illustrators today, Audubon worked without benefit of a stop-action camera. Some people complain of the stiffness of his birds yet he could not detect with the naked eye subtle changes in the wings created by the wind that are visible in photographs. And so his studies of birds in flight have a somewhat wooden ap-

pearance. We have the modern technological advantages of authenticity — his achievements in his time are nonpareil."

Mr. Pratt's "Mourning Dove" reveals the artist's kinship with Audubon's style. The bird's iridescent feathers in shades of lavender and pink have a lifelike quality, it is placed in a simple setting of maple leaves, and its expression conveys the sweetness and soulful song of this species.

The "Least Sandpiper" looks vulnerable in an expanse of

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white paper that emphasizes its small size and diminutive features. Here, the painting reinforces the name of the subject.

In contrast, the "Purple Gallinule" has a red beak, blue neck and green feathers on its torso; perhaps its underpinnings have a purple hue. Added to its motley coloring is a somewhat ungainly conformation.

The "Chachalaca" is a nondescript grey bird of the gallinaceous family. This means chicken-like and accounts for the shape of its legs and toes. Its most intriguing feature is its name, derived from its call and repeated often in its native Texan territory. A laughing gull, a green-backed heron and an American black duck in flight are several other selections on display.

A visitor to the show has an ideal opportunity to compare the contours and demeanor of the illustrated birds with the denizens of the Audubon Cen-

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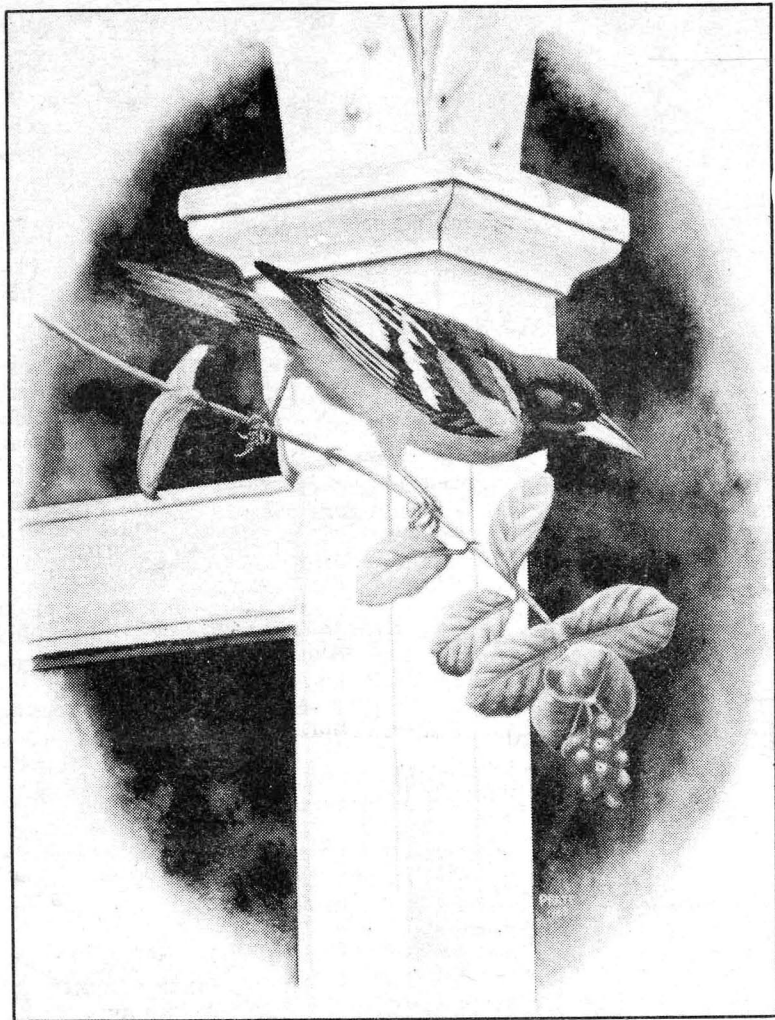
ter fluttering about a feeder just outside the gallery. The paintings are reproduced in several books and field guides, including the Reader's Digest "Book of North American

Birds," Birds of Central Polynesia and Alan Feduccia's "Birds of Colonial Williamsburg."

Mr. Pratt's paintings present birds in groups as well as singly and occasional architec-

tural and floral backdrops are included to help one associate the species with its locale. The series of Hawaiian birds add an exotic flavor to the show.

The exhibition continues through June 30. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.



A Baltimore oriole by H. Douglas Pratt at the Audubon Center.