Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Edouard TRAVIES (Doullens 1809 - Paris 1876)

A White Plumed Antbird (Pithys albifrons) and a Guianan Cock-of-the Rock (Rupicola rupicola)

Watercolour, pen and brown ink and wash, with framing lines in pencil.

Signed and dated Edouard Travies pt. 1835. in the lower margin.

170 x 100 cm. (6 3/4 x 4 in.)

The distinctive white plumed antbird is easily recognisable with its peculiar white tuft. Both male and female antbirds are the same in appearance, and are quite small for their family of birds. Antbirds are native to South America, typically inhabiting the lowlands to the east of the Andes. These birds are also social creatures, with vocal mates and offspring, and males heavily involved in the building of their dens. As their name suggests, the antbird eats insects, other anthropods and sometimes even lizards, and are very resourceful, often relying on army ants to guide them to prey in the undergrowth.

Another delightfully colourful and distinctive bird, the Guianan cock-of-the-rock is quite a large species, native to lowland rainforests in northwest and central South America. The bird illustrated here is an adult male, while females are brown and adolescents are a faded orange and brown. As their name suggests, these birds prefer rocky habitats for their nests and are usually herbivores, eating mostly fruit, although, under certain circumstances, they will also eat small invertebrates and insects. The cock-of-the-rock species is solitary, only interacting during mating, with males being particularly territorial. Each male will clear their territory on the forest floor of rocks and twigs, making their markings clear, and females would then come to their territory. Since the brightest coloured males, with the most pronounced ruffs, tend to be the most desirable for mating, this trait has become more pronounced in the species over time.

The French industrialist and bibliophile Marcel Jeanson (1885-1942) assembled an exceptional collection of French ornithological watercolours of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries assembled in the 1920s and 1930s.

Literature:

Achille Richard, Oeuvres complètes de Buffon, Paris, 1838, Vol. VI.

Artist description:

Among the finest natural history draughtsmen of the 19th century in France, Edouard Traviès de Villers was a gifted watercolourist and illustrator, and exhibited at the Paris Salons between 1831 and 1866. Best known for his ornithological watercolours, his activity in this field culminated in seventy-nine magnificent illustrations for his book Les oiseaux les plus remarquables par leurs forms et leurs couleurs, published in Paris and London in 1857. Traviès also illustrated other works of natural history, such as Types du règne animal: Buffon en estampes; a work intended for children that appeared in 1864. Traviès was further known for his paintings and watercolours of dead game, depicted hanging from a nail on a wall in a sort of trompe-l'oeil effect; indeed, he was one of the first 19th century French artists to develop this theme, which had been established in the previous century by such artists as Jean-Baptiste Oudry.

These watercolours by Edouard Traviès were once part of the exceptional collection of French ornithological watercolours of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries assembled in the 1920s and 1930s by the French industrialist and bibliophile Marcel Jeanson (1885-1942). Several of these watercolours were used to illustrate Achille Richard's Oeuvres complètes de Buffon, published in Paris in 1834, 1838 and 1845.