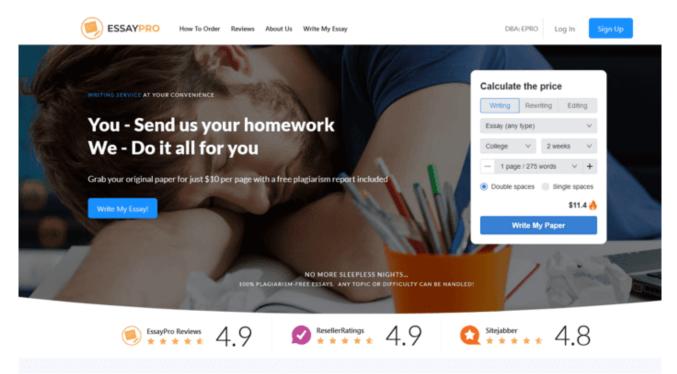
Jean Jacques Audubon



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Jean Jacques Audubon

Realizing that the natural environment requires protection from the wiles of the human race, individuals have organized societies that work to support the protection of species around the globe. I have always loved and supported those that support the environment. So, when I would hear of the National Audubon Society, I instinctively pictured Audubon as a wildlife conservationist and someone I liked very much. I heard about Jean Jacques Audubon before, and at least I thought I knew him very well. But my perception of Audubon always stemmed from his association to the society named after him, not from the writings of the man himself. Needless to say, I liked him very much when I knew less about him. Or so I thought...

Never have my feelings toward an individual fluctuated as much as they have in the past two weeks. Upon reading excerpts from Audubon's journals, I could not help but dislike certain aspects of the individual. How could any society uphold the name of a man who would shoot birds by the dozen and stick wire through them to paint them? Artists are supposed to appreciate the natural world, not destroy it. At the same time, how could he depict reality, if his specimens were manipulated into specific positions, positions that met the painter's eye and not reality at all? These thoughts and many more spiraled through my mind as my <u>stomach</u> squirmed in indignation of Audubon's atrocities. I was livid at the fact that the plentitude of living species he described are no longer plentiful today. I could not believe that a naturalist was among the first to contribute to the decline of the species of my home state. Even the name of his pilot, Egan, sent chills through me when Audubon wrote that Egan was the 'professional hunter of Sea <u>Cows</u> or Manatees for the Havana market'. I could not believe my eyes and cringed at the idea of reading any more about the famous Audubon expedition. In my mind, Audubon registered, not as a painter, but as a hunter, who was hell-bent on getting his studies done in time to meet the expectation of his American and European patrons. Dollar signs, not the sun, glittered in his eyes. I found myself rooting for one hundred and seventy-two year old birds, hoping that they would hear me and fly away before Audubon arrived.

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