

Library event takes flight

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At the first “Flipping the Bird” event since the pandemic, Agnieszka Czeblakow, head of research services at Tulane University Special Collections, prepares to turn a page in a rare volume of John James Audubon’s Birds of America series, on display on the sixth floor of Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

On April 22, Tulane University Special Collections (TUSC) resumed its practice of “Flipping the Bird” — a weekly practice of turning a page in its John James Audubon

Birds of America series.

The staff will turn a page in one of the volumes every Wednesday to reveal one of Audubon's drawings (at one page per week, it will take five years to complete Tulane's three volumes).

The practice also happens at other libraries — and it started at Tulane a few years ago. But it took a two-year hiatus during the pandemic to preserve the delicate books, said Agnieszka Czeblakow, head of research services at TUSC.

The April 22 event sprang from an ornithology class taught by Donata Henry, senior professor of practice in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. The class came to TUSC to view its rare book holdings, Czeblakow said. While students were examining some of the ornithology books, student Maya Jammulapati asked when the still-shrouded Audubon volumes on the sixth floor would be available for viewing again. Their subsequent collaboration led to the Flipping the Bird event: TUSC would open the case and turn the pages, and Jammulapati and Mary Elizabeth Barrow, another of Henry's ornithology students, would present a short lecture about Audubon and a bird of local significance that is on display in Volume II, in this case the hooded warbler.

About 30 people attended the inaugural event; Czeblakow said the collaboration between TUSC and the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology will lead to a monthly lecture in the fall semester.

Bird fanciers need not wait till fall to get their avian fix; they can go to the sixth floor of Howie T every week to see a new bird on display in the Audubon volume and also look around campus for glimpses of the hooded warbler as it passes through New Orleans.