

Linnaeus' and Buffon's Ornithological Methodological During the Age of Enlightenment

Siddharth Satishchandran and Dr. Sandra Norman
Department of History, Florida Atlantic University

Introduction

During the 1700's, several biologists and naturalists attempted to create a myriad of designs in order to imbibe structure in this world of chaotic organisms. Among them were the Swedish biologist Carol Linnaeus (1707-1788) and the French naturalist George Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788). Understanding their methodologies allows us a rare window into mid-eighteenth century discussions about the animal-human relationship and its place in society.

This presentation will argue the similarities and differences in the methodology of these two naturalists by analyzing three distinct birds: the Ibis, the Sandpiper, and the Hummingbird. By analysis of these three birds and an their work one can see that they had laid the foundation for modern biologists to explore further the rich mosaic of life.

Methodology

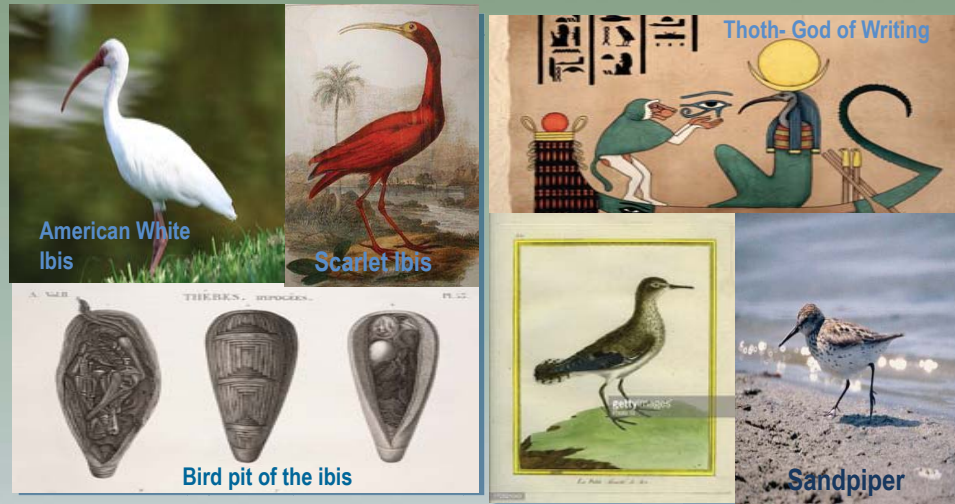
Buffon's methodology is characterized a descriptive and stylish language. His goal was to create a history of the natural world. His audience was not just fellow naturalists, but everyone.

Linnaeus' methodology is characterized by brief and objective description. His goal was to create a taxonomic system of classification and his audience was fellow naturalists similar to him.

Ibis

Buffon's description is based on cultural and religious implications. He writes in his *Histoire Naturelle* that "to kill the Ibis was, among the Egyptians, forbidden under pain of death." Furthermore, Buffon received a mummified Ibis within a bird pit.

Linnaeus' disregards all aspects he feels are unnecessary such as culture and religion. He focuses on anatomy and physiology.



Sandpiper

Buffon's description is based on its outer appearance. As seen from this illustration, he states that "its breast spotted with grey dashes on white... with a small streak of that color on the shaft of each feather."

Linnaeus' description is purely behavioral; he includes courtship behavior and the nesting process.

Hummingbird

Buffon describes it as a delicate bird. He writes that the precious stones and metals polished by our art cannot be compared by this jewel of nature

Linnaeus' description of this bird is different from his previous descriptions. In his work, he teases out aspects of sexual selection through plumage and color.

Discussion

This presentation illuminates the possibilities of using animals as a lens to study history. From this lens, future historians can discuss gender issues during Linnaeus' time period by utilizing sexual selection to understand how scientists perceived female mate choice. Also, using animal sto understand their religious and cultural role in society.

References

- Buffon, George Louis Leclerc. *The natural history of birds from the French of the Court de Buffon*. London: Printed for A. Strachan and T. Cadell in the Strand, and J. Murray... 1793.

- Linne, Carl von, M. S. J. Ledebøer, and Hendrik Engel. *Systema Naturae* 1735. Nieuwkoop Netherlands: B. de Graaf, 1964.