



DETROIT AUDUBON

Fostering appreciation and conservation of birds and the environment we share since 1939

RESEARCH EDUCATION ACTION

National Audubon Society,

We are writing from Detroit Audubon, a large metropolitan chapter that includes a diverse membership of citizens concerned about the decline of bird species, the global loss of habitat, and the climate crisis. Like all members of Audubon across the US, we share a passion to protect the birds we have left and to share our love for all living things with others through volunteering, education, and spending time in wild places. These are the things that unite us, that bring us joy, and that keep us fighting to help those species that need us most. We are discouraged that despite these many positive causes that bring us together under one environmentally focused roof, our organization still carries the name of an enslaver, John James Audubon.

We don't need to tell you about Audubon's past. We applauded and were moved by the series of essays that National Audubon published beginning in 2020. The historian Gregory Nobles wrote that Audubon "dismissed the abolitionist movement" and owned enslaved people on and off for decades, selling them whenever he faced financial difficulties. In Drew Lanham's lovely piece, we read that "[Audubon's] soured, inhumane legacy carried forward will define the future course of the movement he inspired." We were inspired by reading these essays to question how we could still call our organization, one that many of us have spent years and decades of our lives supporting, after a man who very clearly did not recognize many of the people around him as fellow humans. We are called to cherish all species. We treat non-human species with respect and rail against humanity's insatiable quest for dominance over the natural world. To be within an organization named after a man who saw nothing wrong with one man's dominance over another man, who had little respect for many of the people who helped him on his journey, seems like a collective exercise in cognitive dissonance. It is unacceptable.

We can be better. We are better. What this organization has done over the decades for conservation should be celebrated. We are proud to be part of such a revered and prominent collection of concerned citizen scientists, educators, birders, and bird lovers. Let's change our name to reflect that. Let our name be one that lifts up the reverence we feel for the living world. Let our name not tell others that they are less than, but they are as much a part of this movement as anyone else. Let this organization shed its conflicted and complicated past and embrace that which makes us good; that anyone who shares a concern about birds and this beautiful world is welcome at our table.

Respectfully,

Detroit Audubon