

The Heron and the Water-Lily



The
Grandeur
of
Life



Left: Great Heron, drawn by Edward Lear, from John Gould, The Birds of Europe, 1837.

Below: The Egyptian sacred water-lily (pink) and the American water-lily (yellow—the species that Audubon observed), drawn by Peter Henderson, from Robert Thornton, The Temple of Flora, 1807.

Darwin spent many hours pondering the problem of seed transport. In the *Origin of Species*, he discussed the particular case of the water lily. How does it spread from pond to pond? Darwin noted that the seeds are eaten by fish, and he learned that John James Audubon had found a heron (the Louisiana Heron shown on the exhibition's title panel) with water lily seeds in its stomach. Darwin's proposal was that fish eat the seeds; herons eat the fish; then fly to other locations and excrete the seeds. Darwin even did experiments to show that the seeds were robust enough to survive such an experience and still germinate.

