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JOHN JAMES AUDUBON (1785-1851)

A Chaffinch, Bullfinch, and Greenfinch
on a Branch of Budding Chestnuts

Pen and black ink, watercolor, and body color, 14 3/4 x
10 3/4 in.

Signed, dated, and inscribed (at lower right): To Mrs. Lewis
Selby./from her grateful and most obedient servant/John. J.
Audubon/Twizel April 10th/1827.

RECORDED: Maria R. Audubon, Audubon and His Journals, I (1898),
European Journals, pp. 226-27 // Waldemar H. Fries, The Double
Elephant Folio, The Story of Audubon's Birds of America (1973),
pp. 8-10, 14

EXHIBITED: Houston, Texas, 1980, Twenty-Eighth Annual Theta
Charity Antiques Show // Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York,
1982, American Art from the Colonial and Federal Periods, p. 84
no. 70 illus. in color

EX COLL: the artist; by gift to Mrs. Lewis Tabitha Selby, Twizel House, Belford, Northumberland, England; to her daughter, Mrs. Lewis Marriane Bigge; to her daughter, Mrs. Constance Sybil Church; to her son, Sir Geoffrey Selby Church, Bart.

In April 1826 Audubon arrived in England for the purpose of finding a suitable engraver for the publication of his drawings of birds native to America. In October of that year he met Prideaux John Selby (1788-1867), a distinguished ornithologist in his own right, best known for his Illustrations of British Ornithology (1825-29). From April 5 to 11, 1827, Audubon was a house guest at the Selby home, Twizel House, in Belford, Northumberland, during which time he executed this watercolor, dedicating it to his hostess for her hospitality. In his Journals (loc. cit.) he described his stay at Twizel:

"When we returned to the house Mr. Selby conducted me to his laboratory, where guns, birds, etc. were everywhere. I offered to make a drawing and Captain Mitford went off to shoot a chaffinch ... although the shooting season ... was long since over, we took frequent walks with guns, and a few individuals were the sufferers from my anxiety to see their bills and eyes and feathers ... More or less company came daily to see my drawings, and I finished a drawing for Mr. Selby of these birds, a lapwing for Mrs. Selby who drew fully as well as I did and who is now imitating my style, and to whom I have given some lessons"

This watercolor is the "drawing for Mr. Selby of these birds" recorded above, which remained the property of the descendants of the Selby family until recent years. The Captain Mitford whom Audubon mentions was the brother of Mrs. Selby, nee Lewis Tabitha Mitford, who shared his brother-in-law's interest in ornithology and provided some of the illustrations for Selby's Illustrations of British Ornithology. Selby continued his career as a naturalist, founding the Magazine of Zoology and Botany in 1837 with Sir William Jardine and Dr. G. Johnson. In 1842 he published British Forest Trees, a work based on research in the extensive plantation at Twizel. In tribute to Selby, Audubon named Selby's Flycatcher (Muscicapa Selbii) after him.