

# • Meet the Author •

## Jacqueline Davies

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



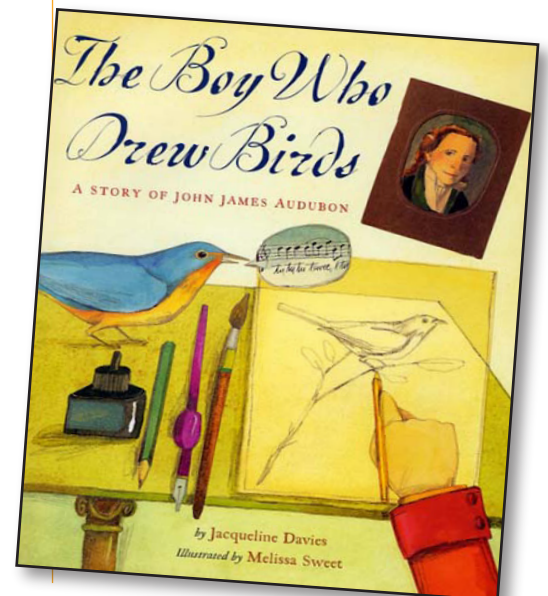
Jacqueline Davies is the author of six books for children, including *Where the Ground Meets the Sky*, *The Boy Who Drew Birds*, *The Night Is Singing*, *The House Takes a Vacation*, *The Lemonade War*, and *Tricking the Tallyman*. Her books have won numerous awards including the John Burroughs Nature Award, the Sigurd Olson Award for Nature Writing, the NSTA Outstanding Science Trade Book for K–12, the NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People, and the New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age. Ms. Davies lives in Needham, Massachusetts, with her husband, their three children, and a rambunctious yellow lab named Harley.

**Beyond his beautiful and well-known bird paintings and the birding society that bears his name, many of us don't know much about John James Audubon. What sparked your interest in him initially?**

**JD:** I came to write about Audubon in a circuitous way. It was actually the birds in the story that interested me at first. I had met a pair of Phoebe birds newly returned to their nest in the spring of 2001, and was fascinated when I learned that the same two birds return to the same nest every year. I wanted to write a picture book about these birds, but couldn't find a way "in" to the story. Who would be my main character? What would be the main character's motivation? And what would be the problem of the story? While doing research on the birds, I discovered a small footnote related to Phoebes: They were the first birds banded in North America, and the banding was done by none other than John James Audubon. From that point on, the story of *The Boy Who Drew Birds* fell into place.

**In what ways was John James Audubon like you as a child? Or is he more like you as an adult?**

**JD:** I think it's the rare child who isn't fascinated by the natural world, and like most children I enjoyed poking around in my backyard, collecting rocks and feathers, caterpillars and lightning bugs. I think, however, my strongest connection to Audubon is in our shared dislocation. As a child, I moved five times before the age of ten. Audubon, too, knew what it was like to be the "new kid on the block." When I wrote about him traveling from France to Pennsylvania, not knowing a soul in his new home, I certainly felt a connection to him.



### Why did you decide to narrow the scope of your biography of John James Audubon to one year in his life as an adolescent?

**JD:** Remember, I was interested in the birds before I was interested in Audubon! So it seemed natural to center the story around this single, important experiment that he performed. In writing the book, however, I found that this one year in his life revealed so much about who Audubon was and who he would become. In many ways, I feel that this one episode does indeed tell the larger story of his life.

### Please share some of the fascinating things about John James Audubon that you had to forego including in your story.

**JD:** Where to begin! He was born in Saint-Domingue and spent the first years of his life in the French Caribbean. The mother who raised him in France was actually a stepmother, and she loved Audubon dearly. For most of his early childhood, Audubon was called Fougère, which is the French word for fern. Audubon was a prolific writer who kept journals and wrote letters every day of his life. His writing style was bubbly and overflowing, sometimes melodramatic, always entertaining. When he first began to write in

English, his letters were filled with confusing, but charming, malapropisms. I wish there had been room in the book to include some of his effusive lines, such as “I am here in the snares of the eagle, he will pluck Me a little and then I Shall [sail] on a sheep.”

### John James Audubon was not only a naturalist and ornithologist, he was an artist of great talent. That makes the art in this illustrated biography particularly important. How do you feel that Melissa Sweet’s work enhances your telling of the Audubon story?

**JD:** Audubon spent his life trying to capture nature, as it existed in the real world, within the pages of his portfolio. Melissa’s art is a wonderful salute to this goal of Audubon’s. Her paintings—watercolor and collage—are filled with three-dimensional objects found in nature: a pinecone, a porcupine quill, a piece of bark, a nest. These found objects make the paintings themselves come alive. It is as if the paintings are breathing. Nothing would have pleased Audubon more.

### How can readers

### learn more about you and your books?

**JD:** The best way to learn more about me and my books is to visit my Web site at [www.jacquelinedavies.net](http://www.jacquelinedavies.net). I also enjoy visiting schools to talk about my books and the writing life.

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of five picture books, most recently Our Librarian Won't Tell Us ANYTHING! A Mrs. Skorupski Story (UpstartBooks, 2006) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*

