

‘For my Mother’
F. G.

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Florence Guiraud

Wonders of Nature

Explorations in the World of Birds, Insects and Fish

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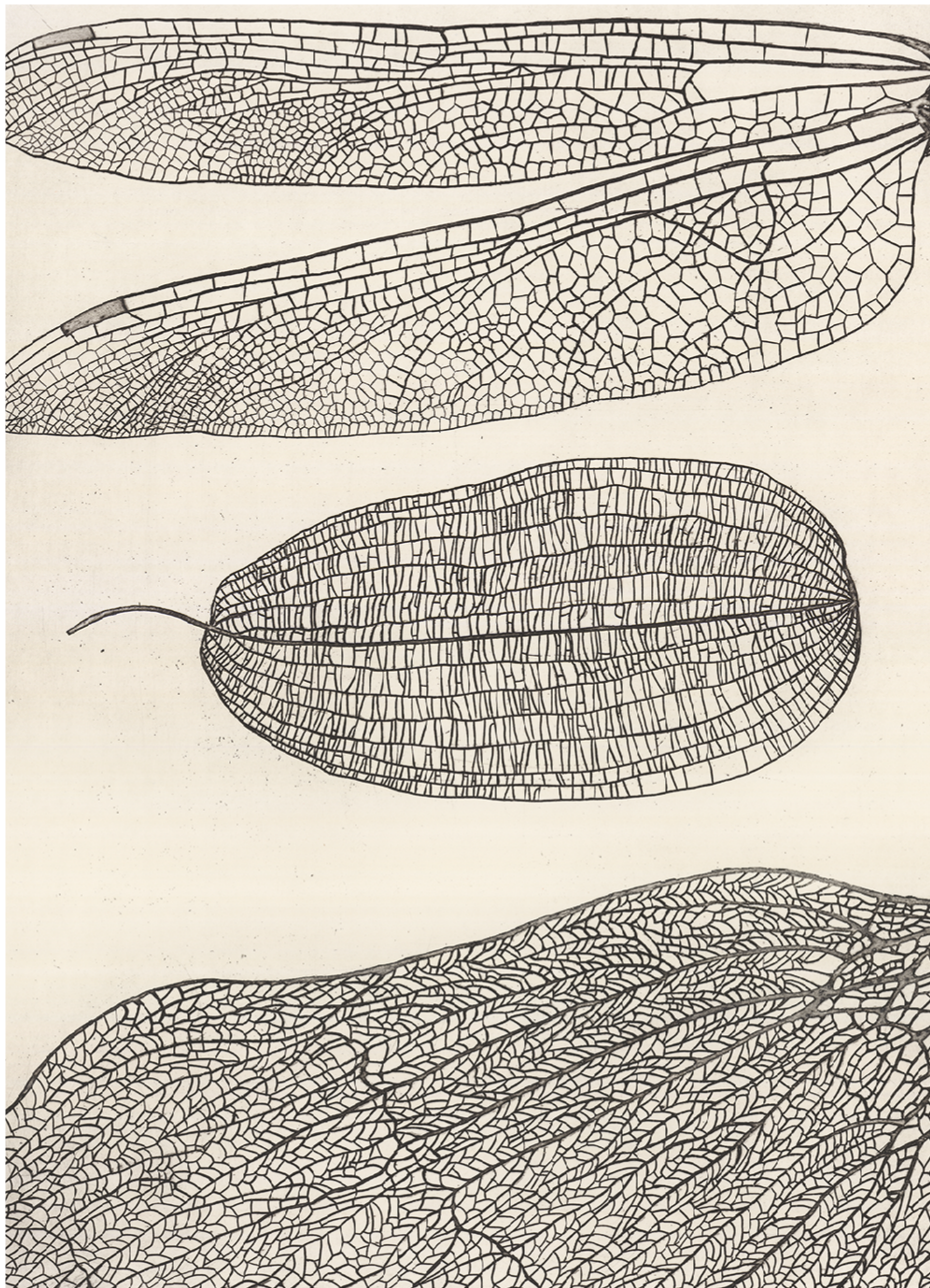


Preface

At the time of the Enlightenment, during the 17th and 18th centuries, European kings and queens funded missions to explore continents around the world. These remarkable journeys were inspired by both curiosity and the desire for riches. Among the explorers who took part were scientists and artists – people who could describe and draw the fascinating plants and animals they encountered in these far away places. With a keen eye for detail, these artist explorers produced extraordinary picture boards and sketchbooks. I have always been fascinated by their images, which used to feed my imagination and, in some cases, remained in my memory for a very long time. Sketches, watercolors, engravings – their pictures were made as scientific records, yet they are also seen today as works of art. As close to reality as the artists could make them, the images have great beauty, sometimes simple and often overwhelming. My wish with this book was to arrange the pictures in subjects that fascinated me the most, something like a cabinet of curiosities.

When it comes to nature, each of us has our own interests and sensibilities. Some prefer to observe, others need to touch, while still others want to listen. Above all, though, it's the beauty of nature that imposes itself on us. I invite you into my cabinet of natural poetry...

Florence Guiraud



Content

**Chap 1: Birds
through a magnifying glass 10**

BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE	12
USEFUL BEAKS	14
LONG NECKS	16
FEATHERS, EGGS AND NESTS	18
PAWS AND MORE	20
NIGHT OWLS	22
<i>Random Directory</i>	24

**Chap 2: Hens, turkeys,
pheasants and the like 26**

HEADS OF FOWL	28
GALLIFORMS	30
INDONESIAN BLACK HEN	32
<i>Random Directory</i>	34

**Chap 3: Insects
of all types 36**

BIZARRE ONES	38
TINY ONES	40
AMAZING FEELERS	42
ELEGANT DRAGONFLIES	44
QUARTET OF BEETLES	46
<i>Random Directory</i>	48

**Chap 4: And now for
the butterflies... 50**

FOCUS ON THE WING	52
NIGHT FLIGHT	54
DAY FLIGHT	56
<i>Random Directory</i>	58

**Chap 5: Natural
sailors 60**

STARFISH AND FAMILY	62
BLUE-RINGED OCTOPUS	64
CRUSTACEANS AND FRIENDS	66
<i>Random Directory</i>	68

**Chap 6: More underwater
beauties 70**

CHECKERED REEFS	72
JELLYFISH	74
RED ALGAE	76
LIKE A GARDEN AT SEA	78
<i>Random Directory</i>	80

**Chap 7: A festival
of fish 82**

HIGH FASHION SCALES	84
ELABORATE TIPS	86
STORIES OF RAYS	88
SAINT-PETER FISH	90
<i>Random Directory</i>	92



Birds through a magnifying glass

The genius of nature

There are nearly 10,000 species of birds around the world, and we continue to discover more every year. From the largest to the smallest, birds are marvels of nature; they have colonized the skies, the earth and the oceans. The planet is theirs. They can be spotted during any season of the year. They are everywhere and all around us. We recognize their silhouettes. I discovered big ones, tiny ones, black ones, multi-colored ones, funny ones and scary ones, too. Just look at the great potoo, with its huge, bulging, yellow eyes. Birds have different temperaments. Some are chatty, others quiet, and still others love to make music – just like the nightingale’s song of love. I counted more than one hundred verbs used to describe the birdsong. Birds have many talents; some cross the continents, whilst others have no clue about flying. Not knowing how to fly is astonishing for a bird! The kiwi, for example, spends its entire life on the ground without a care for being up in the air. Its wings have wasted away over time, whilst its legs have grown larger and more muscular. Now it just runs about on the ground. Nature finds a way to adapt. Whatever their size, all birds lay eggs, have two wings and two legs, are covered in feathers and have beaks bereft of teeth. Some can be dangerous, such as the cassowary with its large foot claw. Other birds can be tender and affectionate. In my research, I discovered all manner of bird occupations: from incredible dancers, surprising and unexpected singers, fabulous acrobats, right through to the satin bowerbird that decorates its nest with all kinds of blue objects. Birds are truly eye-catching. How could one fail to notice the captivating look of nocturnal owls, the finesse of the rock ptarmigan’s fluffy down feathers or the lavish coloring of the harlequin duck’s plumage? And certainly, you’ve noticed the delicate long necks of swans or other wading birds, an absolute picture of pure grace. These extraordinary creatures continue to amaze us!



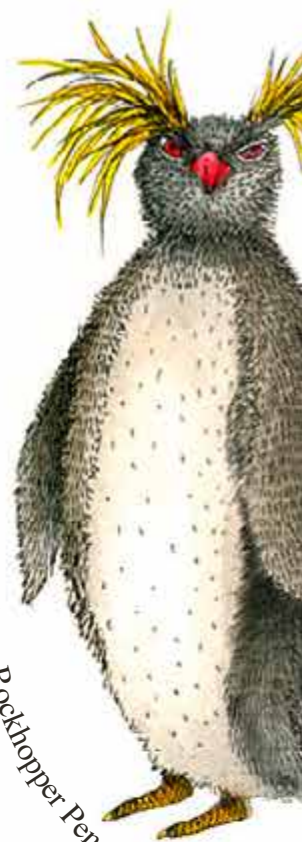
Victoria Crowned Pigeon



Palm Cockatoo



Lyrebird



Southern Rockhopper Penguin



Livingstone's Turaco



Royal Spoonbill



Grey Crowned Crane



Turquoise-Browed Motmot





Royal Flycatcher

Tufted Coquette

Peacock

Snowy Egret

Mandarin Duck

Shoebill

Madagascan Ibis

Hoatzin

Yellow-Billed Stork