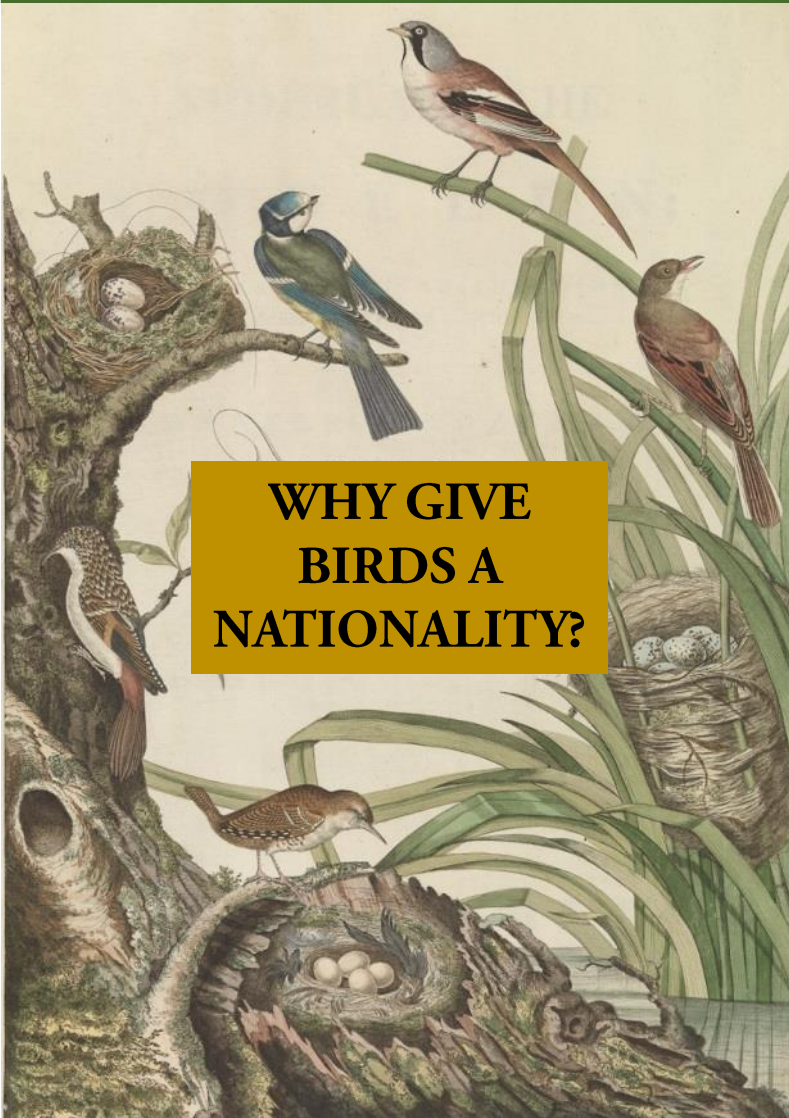


# Imagining the Nation's Nature

Jan Christiaan Sepp's Illustrated Book Series  
on Dutch Birds (1770-1829)

Esther van Gelder

After years of collecting and describing exotic curiosities, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Republic discovered its national nature. My research reveals how a concerned engraver-publisher played a crucial role in transforming natural history into a useful and patriotic endeavor.



WHY GIVE  
BIRDS A  
NATIONALITY?

## CASE: THE BIRDS OF THE NETHERLANDS (5 VOL., 1770-1829)

In 1770 - years before Audubon's well-known *The Birds of America* (1827-1838) - the publisher **Jan Christiaan Sepp** and the Remonstrant preacher **Cornelis Nozeman** initiated a pioneering series on Dutch birds. The '**nationality**' of the birds was proven by the life-size and colored depiction of **wild species** with their **nests and eggs**.



## THEMES

- **THE ARTIST-ENTREPRENEUR** J.C. Sepp (1739-1811) was an engraver and bookseller from Amsterdam. He specialized in **natural history**, and became famous for his book series with excellent hand-colored **engravings**. He closely **collaborated** with other amateur-naturalists.
- **TRANSFORMING NATURAL HISTORY** In a strong tradition of **collecting exotics** indoors, Sepp and his authors instead stressed the **value of useful knowledge** of the **national flora and fauna** gathered in the field. Their central aim was to examine the benefits of local nature for society.
- **SCIENCE IN SOCIETY** Sepp's natural history **books** should be understood **as tools of improvement and nation building**. He and his authors belonged to learned societies concerned with the political, economic and cultural **decline of the Dutch Republic**.



## RESEARCH METHOD & INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

- **RECONSTRUCT** the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century naturalist world through books, correspondence, and archives
- **ANALYSE** natural history books as collaborative products and a bimodal genre (relation text & image)
- **INTERPRET** natural history in cultural framework (Enlightened societies, book market, nation building)