



**A Study of a Male Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*)**

Made for the European market

Calcutta, India, c. 1800–1850

Opaque colours and ink on paper

47.3 cm high, 32.1 cm wide

Provenance: Paul Beilby Lawley Thompson, 1st Baron Wenlock (1784–1852).

Stock No.: A5324

Perching on a branch set against a plain background, a male Asian koel remains vigilant. With glossy black plumage, rich chestnut wing feathers and white tipped primary covets, his colouration is markedly distinct from the female.

This arboreal species may be found in China, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Known as kokila in Sanskrit, the birds are revered for their melodious song and often feature symbolically in classical Indian poetry.

The work was formerly part of an album of Company School paintings in the possession of the aristocrat and Whig politician Paul Beilby Lawley Thompson, 1st Baron Wenlock (1784– 1852). The album featured a magnificent array of paintings from the Lucknow and Calcutta Schools and was undoubtedly compiled by an astute collector with a great appreciation of the genre.

Other notable European collectors of the period were Lady Impey in Calcutta and Marquess Wellesley in Barrackpore. They commissioned Indian artists to produce natural history studies with scientific accuracy. The resultant works were highly accomplished depictions, rendered with extraordinary colour and ornament.

Undoubtedly a member of this canon, the present study demonstrates the work of an exceptionally

talented hand. Not only is the bird technically accurate, the work also conveys a sense of its vitality; the feet clasp onto the branch as the weight descends, the body compresses in anticipation, as though he might spread his wings and fly off the page at any moment.

Bearing the J. Whatman watermark, the study is numbered '402' and erroneously inscribed in Persian 'ku'el māde (female Asian koel)'.

#### Bibliography:

Churchill, WA. *Watermarks in paper in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII centuries and their interconnection*, Amsterdam: Nieuwkoop B De Graaf 1985, authorized reprint 1935, pp.83–84.

Archer, Mildred. *Natural History Drawings in the India Office library*. Commonwealth Relations Office, London, 1962.