

Abbot created striking compositions of statuesque birds in naturalistic poses presiding over miniaturised landscapes often with recognisable plant species. For example, in his 1791 *White Heron* (figure 5) Abbot omitted the stylised vegetation typical of Edwards and included a bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) with millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*). As his work progressed, he continued to rely on firsthand observations of each species and less on Edwards's illustrations. Thus Abbot's slightly later watercolour, *Red-throated Huming Bird* [sic] (figure 6) depicts the only bird he ever portrayed on the wing. The female hummingbird hovers to sip nectar from the flowering cross-vine (*Anisostichus capreolata*).

As an artist illustrating Georgia birds, Abbot had his subject matter clearly defined. Through the years he continued to illustrate many of the same species as well as new discoveries. Not surprisingly, he tended to repeat poses with certain species, while experimenting with new stances for others. For example, later watercolours of the hummingbird followed the basic composition of the earlier watercolour while in contrast to the 1791 *White Heron*, an 1823 drawing showed it swallowing a fish. However, unlike his illustrations of insects, Abbot did not maintain a master set of bird watercolours. Closely related or duplicate drawings dating from approximately the same time suggest that Abbot preferred to complete two or more reproductions based on the same specimen before altering the composition. His series of watercolours portraying the northern mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) demonstrates this because the distinctive white wing bands of this species vary among individual birds. Aware of this, Abbot carefully recorded the banding as it appeared on the specimen before him. Thus he completed the watercolours for Chetham's Library and for Francillon from the same specimen. In mockingbirds of a later date, he relied on different specimens.

In 1793 Abbot began a study of Georgia spiders and during the next five years completed 107 watercolours with a manuscript catalogue describing each figure. These notes contained an introductory essay in which Abbot suggested classifying spiders by the shape of their webs. In this system he divided the spiders into three categories: those with round or regular webs; those with irregular ones; and those with no webs. Such a classification scheme might have become classic, but Abbot never developed it further. Instead, he explained that he included these 'Divisions as a hint to the more skillful' and added that specimens classified in this manner would 'afford another rich Display of the Wonderful and Boundless Variety of Nature'.²⁴ Not even in the accompanying watercolours did Abbot attempt to arrange the spiders in accordance with his classification scheme. He followed the approach used by Eleazar