

10 May 1993

Alice Ford
#206 Pickering Apts.
Newtown, Pennsylvania 18940

Dear Alice,

Mea Culpa! As usual I am beginning another letter by saying I am sorry. I once read that one should never begin a letter with an apology. I've had to do it so many times that I'm not sure if I know how to begin a letter any other way.

First of all, let me say how glad I am that you are well- and busy! Second, you have Scott's and my permission to give your copy of "Of Birds and Texas" to the Free Library of Philadelphia. We think that it will be a wonderful home for the book. I may have told you that Scott and I both studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and we have many cherished memories of Philadelphia. We would be honored if you donated the folio in your name. (You probably have already done so. If you will give me the address of the library and a person there to contact, I will gladly send them a packet of information about us and the creation of the book that may be useful for their archives. Scott and I love the idea of having our names joined with yours for such an important gift.)

This brings me around to the primary purpose of my letter. About a year ago I made contact with a literary agent named Christina "Kit" Ward who lives in the town of North Scituate, Massachusetts not far from Boston. I believe she was once an executive with Brown, Little and Company. She is now working for herself. I was told about her by my brother, Dr. Peter Gentling, who lives in Asheville, North Carolina. She is handling his recently completed book about Japanese esthetics for American gardens.

I sent her a copy of our bird book to see if she thought we might be able to get it published in a smaller format. That she was overwhelmed is almost an understatement. She simply could not understand why we had never attempted to get our book published before. She wanted to start showing the book to various publishers immediately, but we ran into a major problem. Three years ago I gave my permission to John Graves, who wrote the wonderful essay for our book titled "Recollections of a Texas Bird Glimpser," to re-publish his piece with a small press in Dallas. And though the press only printed 200 or so copies under a different title, I could not get permission to re-publish it in our own new book, since it might compete with theirs.

I didn't see it that way at the time, but I now believe that not being able to use the Graves text has proved to be a blessing in disguise, since we have now decided to create a very different kind of format altogether. We plan to add a number of watercolor bird studies and pencil drawings and perhaps more landscape paintings if the editors permit. To replace the Graves text I am writing a detailed history of our original elephant folio beginning with our early childhood interest in John James Audubon and continuing through the completion of

the book project itself. I tell about our successes and failures, our influences - including your books which have been such an important part of our large library since our early teens. A major part of my essay is about our discovery and purchase of the Audubon Grackle painting and how that painting saved our project from disaster. Throughout the narrative I tell about our early trips up along the Ohio and Mississippi shores tracing J.J.A.'s life and travels and travails. In essence, then, I weave Audubon's life story into our own story.

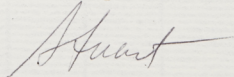
I have not yet finished my first draft which is rather rough in places and may contain too much detail about the business side of our project. I decided to tell all in the first draft regardless of whether it is published or not, since I want to leave an accurate record of our experiences as I remember them. I end my account of us and Audubon and "Of Birds and Texas" with the arrival of your letter in July 1989, from literally out of the blue! Your coming into our lives at that time made a wonderful "closing of the circle" that started so many years ago with your books on Audubon's insects, his quadrupeds, his 1826 journals, your selection of J.J.A.'s ornithological biographies (one of which we own - his account of the Red-shouldered Hawks) and, of course, your magnificent biography of the great bird artist, both the original and the revised editions. And although you did not know who we were at the time you wrote of J.J.A.'s grackle painting for your revised biography, Scott and I still feel that we are a part of that book.

All of this has brought to mind an intriguing possibility. Since I do believe that we stand a good chance to get our book published in a trade edition, the book will have to be appealing to a national audience and not just considered another piece of Texana. We were aware of this when we did our first book, and two-thirds of the birds we depicted are well-known in the rest of the United States. The watercolor studies we wish to add will increase this proportion. It has been suggested that we find a nationally known bird person to write some sort of introduction. This, quite frankly, would not be difficult to do.

It was while contemplating this that Scott and I almost immediately thought of you. John James Audubon was made a part of our lives because of your work, and that makes you both spiritual mentors. Our new book is tentatively titled "Of Birds and Texas, Audubon, and Us." Your contribution could be as long or as short as you wish, and it need not even mention us. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of my first draft for your inspection and hopefully your advice. I am trying to keep the tone of my story as informal and conversational as possible.

Do think about it, Alice. It would be a singular honor indeed to have something written by you become a part of our own tribute to Audubon. Could you think of anything more fitting? I can't.

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stuart", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.