

THE GENTLING BOOK OF TEXAS BIRDS

PROSPECTUS

Occasionally there occurs in the world of book publishing an event so special as to justify superlatives. Such an event is the recent publication of a new book entitled OF BIRDS AND TEXAS, a Great Imperial Folio with color plates and commentary by painters Scott and Stuart Gentling and an important new work of prose by noted Texas author John Graves. Although this book is dedicated to the memory of John James Audubon and its folio-size format will inevitably lead to comparisons with the great ornithological books of the past, OF BIRDS AND TEXAS is not a book just about birds. In spite of its impressive size it is an intimate work which presents the personal views of three Texas artists as they look at their state, its long history and a few of its more interesting inhabitants -- feathered and otherwise.

This special Gentling-Graves collaboration is further enhanced by the association of master printer David Holman of Wind River Press and book binder-conservator Craig Jensen, both of Austin, Texas. This team has created a book of exceptional elegance that has no precedent in the history of Texas arts and letters. Rare book dealers, librarians, museum directors, critics and aficionados of Texana have received the book with enthusiasm and praise -- and no small amount of astonishment that such an ambitious project could be successfully undertaken by a small regional press. This prospectus can only hint at what the book OF BIRDS AND TEXAS is really like. It simply must be seen to be fully appreciated.

The inspiration for doing the book began with the Gentlings in 1966, but the twin brothers did not actually start the project until a decade later. It took about eight years to produce the paintings which comprise this volume's 50 offset color plates. Both plates and text are printed on sheets of acid-free, Mohawk Superfine paper measuring 22 inches by 28 inches. The publication of a fine art book of such dimensions has never been successfully attempted in Texas. As with many of the best European books of similar scale and importance, the pages of this volume are not bound but are arranged in two linen-covered portfolios which are then placed in a linen-covered box. Both the box and portfolios are structured with museum caliber bookboard. They are designed by Craig Jensen and are handcrafted at the Jensen Bindery in Austin. Only the most appropriate PH neutral (acid-free) materials have been used throughout to insure that the book meets the highest standards of archival quality.

In the critical matters of typography and page design award-winning printer David Holman worked closely with the Gentlings to create a work of classical clarity and simplicity. He printed the entire text by letterpress, setting the type by hand, using Centaur monotype, an elegant lettering derived from texts carved upon the Column of Trajan at Rome. At the same time that he was working on the text, Holman was also printing the color plates by himself. Because of the book's exceptional page size, it was necessary for him to purchase two Heidelberg presses especially for this project. The resulting product of both presses, issuing from a one-man shop, has been described as nothing less than a printing tour-de-force.

THE PORTFOLIOS

Portfolio One contains 10 color plates of Texas landscape subjects painted in the Gentlings' more familiar drybrush watercolor style. A page of commentary precedes each plate. Stuart Gentling contributed the Acknowledgements and the Introduction as well as the dedication page enhanced by a small portrait of John James Audubon by Scott Gentling. The Foreword was written by Harry Tennison, world sportsman and conservationist and currently president of Game Conservation International.

The literary highlight of this portfolio is an essay by John Graves entitled "Recollections of a Texas Bird Glimpser". Graves is best known for his book, GOODBYE TO A RIVER, which has been issued in thirteen editions in this country and translated into eight foreign languages. Many critics consider it to be the finest Texas book ever written. Discussing John Graves in his book, TALKING TO TEXAS WRITERS (1980), Patrick Bennett writes that, "He is perhaps the writer most admired and respected by his fellow Texas writers.... John Graves is the writer's writer in Texas.... He thinks clearly and then writes in wonderful style, one of the more distinctive styles of our era."

Although he has produced a significant number of essays and magazine articles, John Graves is not regarded as a prolific writer. He has produced for the public only a few precious works in hard-cover, all of which have won awards and unqualified praise, especially from the most difficult critics of all -- his fellow artists. His three major books, GOODBYE TO A RIVER (1960), HARD SCRABBLE (1974), and FROM A LIMESTONE LEDGE (1980) and two shorter works, THE LAST RUNNING (1959, 1974) and BLUE AND SOME OTHER DOGS (1981), have created a dedicated following which

knows well that any new work by John Graves is a publishing event of importance. In "Recollections of a Texas Bird Glimpser" the author reviews his life and some of the people and places of his native Texas and elsewhere which have influenced him as man and artist. It is both an amusing and a serious piece. Most of Graves's writing is autobiographical, but "Recollections" is perhaps his most personal work so far.

Portfolio Two contains 40 color plates of Texas birds with a page or more of Gentling commentary preceding each plate. All the birds except the wild turkey are depicted life-size against backgrounds of the state's many different regions, showing seasonal changes and the varying moods of day and night. In keeping with the book's dedication to Audubon, the Gentlings have also included two remarkable pieces of Audubon memorabilia. On page 73 is a facsimile reproduction of the first page of an original Audubon manuscript, the great bird artist's unedited first-draft account of the red-shouldered hawk written in 1830 for his famous ORNITHOLOGICAL BIOGRAPHY. The entire manuscript is published here for the first time with Audubon's punctuation, spelling and charming syntax preserved unedited, thus giving the reader a rare insight into the man and his thinking. The manuscript serves as commentary to the Gentlings' own portrait of the red-shouldered hawk.

The twin brothers also share with the reader a very unique and important Audubon discovery which they made while working on the book. On page 87, published for the first time in its unaltered, original state, is an Audubon painting of a pair of boat-tailed grackles which the artist created in 1824 in Philadelphia at the time when he made his first attempt to find a publisher. The story of Audubon's Philadelphia experience is one of the most interesting highlights of his many biographies, but mysteries have remained until the Gentlings spotted this small painting in a print dealer's catalogue, recognized the work for what it was and bought it. By an interesting coincidence the painting came into their hands in January 1985, the bicentennial year of Audubon's birth. It has since been authenticated by the New York Historical Society, the leading authority on Audubon paintings.

The Historical Society also confirmed Scott and Stuart Gentling's belief that this picture was, indeed, Audubon's first published work. It is the very picture, long thought to be lost or destroyed, which appeared considerably altered in plate IV,

volume one of Charles Lucian Bonaparte's four-volume supplement to Alexander Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY. Wilson's book was the first great publication about American birds produced in this country. It was Audubon's cold reception by the Philadelphia science and publishing establishment and the manner in which this particular picture was treated that made him resolve to go to Europe to find a publisher for his BIRDS OF AMERICA. The whole fascinating story is told in the Gentling commentary which also provides insights into many of the mysteries not answered by existing biographies. This picture of the boat-tailed grackle, sometimes called the great crow-blackbird in Audubon's day, is not only Audubon's first published bird painting, it is the only Audubon bird painting published in the artist's lifetime that remains in private hands. It is published in the Gentling-Graves book in facsimile size for the first time as Audubon actually painted it and would have wanted it to be seen. Its re-discovery and publication here unites OF BIRDS AND TEXAS in a very unique way to the two most important 19th century books about American birds -- Alexander Wilson's AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGY and the BIRDS OF AMERICA by John James Audubon.

CONCLUSION

OF BIRDS AND TEXAS is certain to become a classic in the history of Texas publishing, but this book is meant to be more than a regional work. With the publication of this prospectus it is now being offered for the first time to dealers and collectors outside the state. So far more than half the regular edition has been sold -- mostly to Texans. And all the Artists' Copies have been spoken for. With less than 250 books remaining for collectors in the rest of the country and abroad, there is no way of predicting how long the supply may last. Unfortunately dealers will rarely have copies available for inspection, since most of them already have clients in mind when they place their orders, and the books never remain in their care for long. While this brochure adequately describes the general contents of the Gentling-Graves book, it has already been noted that it can not convey a sense of its impressive physical presence. A brochure simply cannot take the place of actually reviewing the book in person as most of the collectors in Texas have done. Those who wish to purchase a copy should fill out and mail the accompanying order card. If you are interested but would like to make further inquiries, please do not hesitate to call. Orders will be filled according to the postage date of the purchase order.